



Master of Education

**Cultivating Indigenous Capacity Building Through
Leadership Development**

Helen Kennedy

**School of Education
RMIT University**

Master of Education by Project

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|-------------------------|--|
| Title: | An exploration of how my life experiences and my leadership journey have informed my professional practice in Indigenous capacity building |
| Candidate's name | Helen Kennedy Bachelor of Arts, Swinburne University, 1988 |
| Name of School | School of Education RMIT University |
| Date submitted: | 3 September 2008 |

Front cover:

As explained by the artist, Lyn Briggs, a Wiradjuri-Yorta Yorta woman:

The painting shows the importance of nurturing our youth... our future leaders of our communities. The elders pass the message sticks, sharing their wisdom and knowledge to help strengthen the spiritual well being of each young person. Our people are linked together to build safe and healthy communities. Rising up is a colorful vibrant rainbow full of hopes and dreams that will lead them to the future.

DECLARATION

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the candidate alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

SIGNED

DATED

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge and dedicate this MA by project to the following people:

My family – particularly Lionel, my loving rock who has supported all my dreams. It's your turn now!

Mum and Dad for everything, my daughters Stella and Naomi as well as Reeka, Robert and Angie, Jirra and grandkids Jessica, Kiara and new baby Robert Jnr – thank you for your love.

The deadly team I worked with as part of the VACSAL Koorie Community Leadership Program: Dr. Alf Bamblett for providing me with the apprenticeship I needed, wisdom and leadership; Dr. Mark Rose for being an inspiring and collaborative educator as well as for his continuing friendship and Linda Bamblett my sister for being so amazing and for spreading her wings and flying high.

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Abstract

This research is presented as an exegesis with an accompanying project. In this exegesis, I have explored how my own life experiences and leadership journey have informed my professional practice in Indigenous capacity building.

The relationship between Indigenous capacity building and the promotion of leadership development is the underlying basis of my research. This is an increasingly important area in Aboriginal Affairs and public policy given the currency of debates around Indigenous capacity building as a strategy towards overcoming entrenched disadvantage experienced by so many Indigenous people. This is juxtaposed with the increasing recognition of the need to promote new and emerging Indigenous leadership as a strategy to ensure the future survival and growth of strong, self-determining Aboriginal communities.

A key element of my research is the development and construction of a model which describes the key characteristics or determinants of Indigenous capacity building through developing Indigenous leadership. This has been constructed from my own experiences, research and analysis and reflects the primacy of leadership in debates around Indigenous capacity building.

The model demonstrates that there are three key separate yet interrelated components of Indigenous capacity building through promoting leadership development. Interwoven through and between each of these components is the

importance of culture which is the all permeating centre of the model and cannot be underestimated.

The first component in the model focuses on the importance of internally based capacity building which I have described as 'intra capacity building.' This represents a cluster of interdependent characteristics that combined together, contribute towards building stronger 'internal' capacities as a necessary strengthening factor which builds resilience and are all essential leadership qualities. They includes attributes such as the development of self knowledge, self confidence and self awareness, cultural identify and healing from the impacts of colonisation.

The second component in the model focuses on the importance of the more externally developed 'inter capacity building' which explores the importance of connection to supportive and quality relationships, an increase in the building of networks and their application to the workplace as well as pathways to employment and education.

The third component of the model focuses on the combined impact of intra-personal and inter-personal capacity development on the broader Aboriginal community through contributing towards growing and sustaining the leadership base and ensuring on-going community engagement through governance arrangements.

The model I have constructed has been validated from interviews and focus groups undertaken with graduates of the VASCAL Koorie Community Leadership Program and is supported by the findings of my own research which has examined with much personal depth, reflection and analysis, my own life experiences and leadership journey.

The methodologies I have used in the development of my two case studies respectively have included a thematic analysis of interviews and focus groups with graduates from the VACSAL Koorie Leadership Program and an auto ethnographic approach as part of a reflexive analysis of my own leadership journey.

This exegesis will provide a major contribution to the growing amount of work on Indigenous capacity building and recognition of the integral role of leadership development in this context. The project element of my research will further contribute to this by promoting key learnings from my research by making available a training resource guide for use in education, training and community settings.

My conclusion acknowledges the significant life experiences and leadership journey I have personally experienced, which are parallel in nature to the experiences of the many Koorie leadership participants.

The Product

The Product consists of a collection of artefacts sourced from my professional work in seven Indigenous Community Capacity Building projects and the major project (Case Study Two), the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association (VACSAL) Koorie Community Leadership Program.

The key learnings from my research, including the **Model of Key Characteristics of Indigenous Capacity Building through developing Indigenous leadership** (p. 22) will be available as a Training Resource Guide for use in education, training and community settings.

Letter to my daughters

Below is a letter I wrote to my two daughters as part of this research as a way to capture the essence of my life experiences and on-going leadership journey and to continue to honour the honesty and integrity of this research. Whilst clearly this is only 'one' of my voices, and arguably a sanitised voice in some regards, it provides some significant reflections for my research.

Dear Naomi and Stella

This is a letter from your mother that shares some of the events in my life that have not only helped shape who I am, but hopefully will assist and possibly inspire you in your different journeys through life where you encounter inevitable obstacles, challenges and the search for your own distinctive identities. These events are based mainly on my early life and career.

When I was 13 years old, your Grandfather came home one day and told us that the family – including myself and your uncles, had received Government subsidies and 'pocket money' (\$4 a fortnight) because of your Grandfather's Aboriginality from Tasmania. The biggest surprise was not so much the subsidies/financial assistance, but our 'newly discovered' Aboriginality. After talking to Pop at some length, he shared with us some memories of life in Tasmania (Ulverstone especially) and the pressure to hide their Aboriginality as part of the need to 'fit in' and as a survival strategy against a backdrop of extremely racist attitudes in a small country town.

Whilst he remembers that his Aunts (who lived with the family) were quite dark skinned – it was never something that was embraced or talked about openly. At the same time he shared some strong memories of being told by his 'white' friends, that their parents had said that they were not allowed to come to his house because they were 'black'. I remember feeling very confused by all of this but also interested in learning more about my cultural heritage.

Since then of course, I am able to 'unpack' and make sense of this 'hidden' past by learning about Government Assimilation policies in this country and how they have so strongly shaped negative attitudes about Aboriginal people, and how this has inevitably been internalised by many people of Aboriginal descent in terms of issues around identity. The discovery of our Aboriginality

when I was thirteen has since become the single most influential event that has shaped my development as a woman as well as my values, my career, my humour, my friends and choices in partners and many of the major decisions in my life. My journey to understand my cultural heritage and what this means to me continues to this day.

Your grandmother was active in finding out information – including our family tree and developing a picture of how our family was affected by removal from land and family (i.e. this started off originally with an ancestor being 'stolen' by a sealer from Bunnerong country), dispossession and racist attitudes. I remember her being very angry by what she discovered and she was determined to share this knowledge about Australia's past by drawing on her developing knowledge about our family's history and sharing this with anybody who would listen. This included offering – and giving – talks to School groups. As you know your Nan is a wonderful woman who has been a major and positive influence in all of our lives. I think that her actions back then are an example of a strong influence on me to show courage to 'make a difference' despite the 'unpopularity' of an issue in her (and Pop's) life long quest to achieve social justice.

My mother wanted me to go to a Girls' school, despite Pop's protestations that the Public School system was just as good as the Private School system. Interestingly, this is an issue which is 'hot' in our house this year as we struggle to make the right choices for you (especially you Naomi in preparation for 2009!)

Your Nan won the day and I enrolled in Secondary School at Avila Girls College. I had a pretty good time at this School – although I have strong memories about Australian history classes and being read extracts from Geoffrey Blainey books where Aboriginal people were referred to in the past tense and as being 'noble savages', which pretty much disgusted me because I knew the truth.

But it was in Year 11 where I was forced to make a 'life changing' decision that helped shaped the recognition of my own worth and the beginning of independent thinking and making life choices. At the age of just 15 and a half (I was one of the youngest girls in my class) I had just finished Year 11 and some brutal end of year examinations which had been introduced in the school for the first time.

I found the whole examination process really stressful. My relative immaturity/youthfulness combined with having to complete examinations for the first time ended up having a negative impact on my end of year results. Whilst I certainly did not fail – my results were only average.

My mother and I were asked to meet the Principal to discuss my future. We went along – having no idea what we would be discussing. At the meeting was the Principal and the Typing teacher (which I thought was a bit strange) and basically I was told that a job had been lined up for me to start in a few weeks working with a friend of the Typing teacher doing a bit of modelling and secretarial duties. I was told that this could be a fantastic opportunity (especially since I was so tall! and, that it was the best option for my future given that I would not be able to succeed in Year 12 given my Year 11 exam results (remember back then your exam results counted for 100% of your marks). I was told to think over the job offer and make a decision by the next day.

*It wasn't really that hard to make a decision. I think Nan was quietly freaking out about what I would decide – but she told me very strongly that it was **my life** and in the end it needed to **my decision**.*

Whilst she helped out with giving me some other options apart from leaving school – I needed to make this decision on my own.

Eventually I decided that I really couldn't see myself leaving school at just 15 – there was a whole world out there that I wanted to learn about! I decided to reject the offer and soon after I enrolled in what was known as an 'Alternative School' and did an alternative year 12 – called the Tertiary Orientation Program.

I ended up doing some fantastic subjects that really interested me – Psychology, Sociology and Drama etc. At the School, whilst there were a few other young people enrolled, they were mainly mature aged students enrolled with incredible life experiences to share and I developed many strong and supportive friendships. It was a great experience – and one of the first for me 'outside of my comfort zone'. Not only does it remain one of the most memorable years of my life – but my academic results were high enough to get entry into Swinburne University where I was told it was the best place to study Psychology.

*The message for you girls here is that sometimes you may have really, really strong (and powerful) 'external' messages that can influence your self perception and the choices that you make. They can be subtle or in my case blatant - and they can come from so called 'experts' or people in 'authority' or the Media that perpetuates stereotypes and myths about Aboriginal people. There is much pressure in this society to 'conform', to be 'compliant.' Sometimes in my case, people want you to conform to what they regard is in your best interests – which is a disguise for what's really about using you to serve their **own** interests.*

In my case, the courage to not conform to Avila's carefully laid plans that held the key for my future was not easy (part of me was enticed by an idealised lifestyle full of glamour and nice clothes!) but was a great early lesson in life about taking responsibility for your own life and recognising my own self worth despite the messages sent by the School that I was a failure whose destiny would be formed from leaving school and entering the workforce at the ripe old age of 15. My goal of going to University was achieved in the end – it just took a different route to get there than the one that I expected.

Studying at Swinburne was also a great experience – with lots of learning and also lots of fun! I probably should have done a bit more studying and less socialising.

There were three things that I want to share with you about this experience. Firstly, in studying third year Psychology I learnt about Dr. Abraham Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Human Needs' i.e. that there is a hierarchy of human needs that is not culturally-based and extends from our basic need to survive, through to our needs for security, social acceptance, self-esteem and the pinnacle of human need – to become 'self-actualised'. It was the self-actualisation that really interested me – it can be described as our desire for fulfilment – and the quest to become the best you can be by deciding what you want from life and then doing what is necessary to get it.

So of course I was really interested in this concept of self-actualisation. But it was after the definition was explained that I was really thrown and I'll never forget the moment. The Lecturer said that few of us in the class, if any, would reach the stage of self-actualisation. I knew then that I would do everything in my power to become one of the 5% statistic that he quoted – I would not be defined by statistics that determined personal fulfilment and it represented to me a fundamentally important personal quest and journey that I would actively work towards fulfilling – and I believe I have come pretty close to reaching it. I hope you too can be inspired by this...

Another critical incident occurred when I was involved in Student politics after I befriended a student in my Psychology class who was the President of the Student Union. At the next election my friend ran for President – I ran for VP – I was the only one to get elected from our ticket.

What this made me realise at the time is the quality that I have where I often 'lead from behind' by supporting and encouraging others. The actual outcome of this incident was that despite my agenda and efforts to support and help realise someone else's leadership ambitions – I inadvertently realised my own leadership capacity by virtue of getting so many more votes than the person they were intended for. It certainly was the beginning of an awareness of my own leadership style – certainly my preference for 'leading from behind' but also the awareness that

you often can't 'manufacture' leadership. It also gave me some quiet confidence in my own leadership ability and that clearly – the different things I stood for at that election were very appealing to others – and that people were prepared to vote against the grain to mix and match their votes in different tickets....

An experience when I was a student and had to walk through a student lounge to get to my student union office and suffer the indignity of seeing 'soft pornography' (as sponsored by the Student Union) watched by many male students, represented a huge challenge for myself personally. I was influenced by my mother from a very early age about 'feminism' and knew that I had a right to not be exposed to degrading images of women in my own educational learning environment and experience the leers and jeers of male students towards women as they walked through this public area.

As an officer bearer with the student union – I had the ability to raise this issue at the level of the Student Union and attempt to get these videos banned. When I first put forward a motion to get them banned – the motion was passed despite the different political allegiances of the other entire executive to me, this was a great victory and outcome – but the euphoria was short lived.

There was intense anger and resentment at this decision. So much of this was directed to me personally – I was personally attacked by fellow students many times. This grew to a more public demonstration of opposition when a group of students broke into the student media office and sabotaged the soon to be printed student newspaper.

These students replaced the centre spread with a centre fold version of a naked Helen Kennedy – by superimposing the body of a naked woman connected to a picture of my head! I can really laugh about it now but at the time it was devastating. Around 2000 copies were printed before the newspaper was recalled and copies shredded. What this taught me was the ability to take risks to advance something you believe in strongly despite the potential for decisions to be unpopular. I also had to very quickly inform/educate myself of issues around civil liberties, censorship and individual rights in order to arm myself with arguments to support my case. It is not enough to simply argue your case because you know you are right – I learnt very quickly to anticipate the oppositional view point and prepare points of argument against them!

It also taught me the need to be resilient and strong in the face of criticism and attacks. I think I had one day which I spent in bed feeling sorry for myself and refusing to go to class. After that I knew that I needed to 'bounce back', get on with things and not be deterred by the actions of a misguided minority. At this time what also helped me get through this incident was the support of

family. I actively sought out their support – and I hope that the two of you never hesitate to reach out for family support because that's where real unconditional support makes you strong and of course – remember that **no one** will ever love you as much as your family does – your grandfather taught us all that !

Another experience during this time that has stayed with me was sitting at one of the first meetings I have ever attended and just being awe-inspired by the way in which the Equal Opportunity Officer was able to express her words so confidently and articulately. I was asked if I had anything to say and completely froze. I felt totally out of my depth. Whilst it is a feeling I have had since then, I still remember thinking that I wanted to grow up and be just like this woman!

I hope that you will seek out in your life those who you regard as your role models – there are plenty around – and try to keep clear of those who aren't. This is something that I have tried to do and it really does add more to your life and they are a great source of support and strength.

Unfortunately my daughters, you will also need to come to terms with dealing with death and the loss and the grief that comes with it. As you know, coming from such a large family and being so connected with the Aboriginal community generally, death never goes away. I myself in the last decade alone have lost many close friends who were also community role models – many in their 30's. This loss has a personal as well as a community impact and takes its toll. It is important for you to consider three things. Firstly, you need to be very mindful of your own health – much premature death is preventable. Secondly, reach out to others when dealing with grief and loss – you will never be alone and others will be a source of great comfort. Thirdly, be aware of the risks of masking your pain and self medicating. You don't have to look far in your own family to see the outcomes of this – it doesn't work.

Finally – as you know, you are very important to both your families and the broader Aboriginal community. You are very fortunate to come from families with proud histories of demonstrating leadership and courage in fighting for social justice generally as well as for your own community. This is something to be very proud of and I am sure you will continue to contribute to this legacy. Whilst you are already so strong in your identities, I hope you continue to learn about who you are and understand that despite the consequences of colonisation today (such as not being able to speak or write fluently in Yorta Yorta language) you are part of a rich diverse cultural base that will continue to evolve through efforts of many of your extended family, including your own brother and sisters as well as your many cousins and of course, your aunts and uncles. Whilst the complexities of this may provide you with grief and frustration from time to time, you will continue to be enveloped by it with love, wisdom, warmth, humour and nurturing and it will sustain you.

In the true spirit of the cycle of life, as I write these last words, your first baby nephew - and first grandson to us - has just been born.

I want you to know that despite 'normal' maternal worries about the state of the world you are inheriting, I have every confidence that you will continue to pave the way for the next generation like your nephew Robert Junior will after you. You will walk proudly in the footsteps of your ancestors, just like your ancestors have done for many thousands of years. Importantly, I know that you will do this in your own inimitable ways and style!

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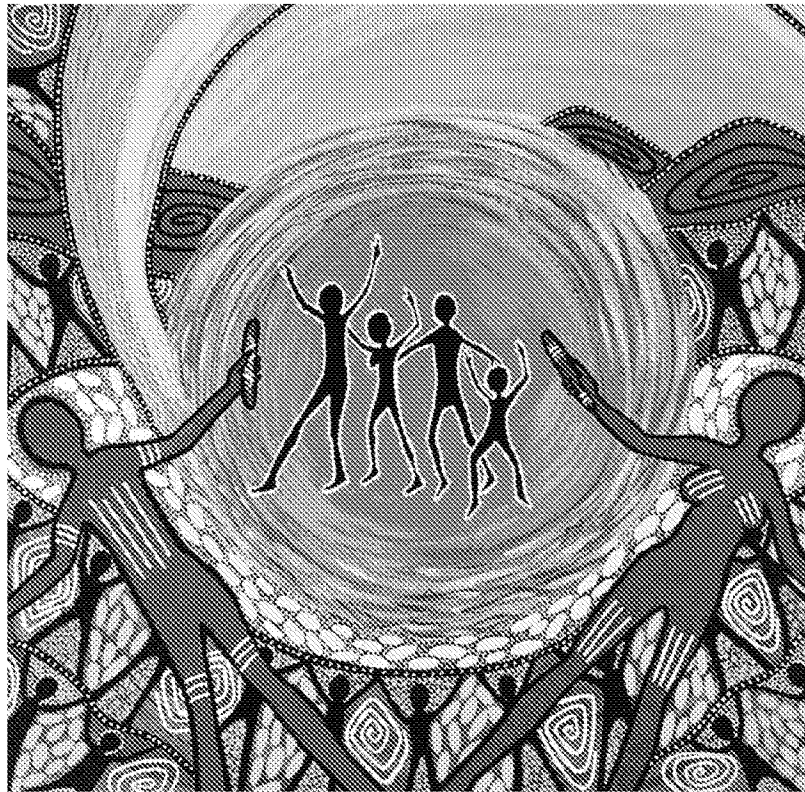
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The key learnings from my research, including the **Model of Key Characteristics of Indigenous Capacity Building through developing Indigenous leadership** (p. 22) will be available as a Training Resource Guide for use in education, training and community settings.

Letter to my daughters

Below is a letter I wrote to my two daughters as part of this research as a way to capture the essence of my life experiences and on-going leadership journey and to continue to honour the honesty and integrity of this research. Whilst clearly this is only 'one' of my voices, and arguably a sanitised voice in some regards, it provides some significant reflections for my research.

Dear Naomi and Stella

This is a letter from your mother that shares some of the events in my life that have not only helped shape who I am, but hopefully will assist and possibly inspire you in your different journeys through life where you encounter inevitable obstacles, challenges and the search for your own distinctive identities. These events are based mainly on my early life and career.

When I was 13 years old, your Grandfather came home one day and told us that the family – including myself and your uncles, had received Government subsidies and 'pocket money' (\$4 a fortnight) because of your Grandfather's Aboriginality from Tasmania. The biggest surprise was not so much the subsidies/financial assistance, but our 'newly discovered' Aboriginality. After talking to Pop at some length, he shared with us some memories of life in Tasmania (Ulverstone especially) and the pressure to hide their Aboriginality as part of the need to 'fit in' and as a survival strategy against a backdrop of extremely racist attitudes in a small country town.

Whilst he remembers that his Aunts (who lived with the family) were quite dark skinned – it was never something that was embraced or talked about openly. At the same time he shared some strong memories of being told by his 'white' friends, that their parents had said that they were not allowed to come to his house because they were 'black'. I remember feeling very confused by all of this but also interested in learning more about my cultural heritage.

Since then of course, I am able to 'unpack' and make sense of this 'hidden' past by learning about Government Assimilation policies in this country and how they have so strongly shaped negative attitudes about Aboriginal people, and how this has inevitably been internalised by many people of Aboriginal descent in terms of issues around identity. The discovery of our Aboriginality when I was thirteen has since become the single most influential event that has shaped my development as a woman as well as my values, my career, my humour, my friends

and choices in partners and many of the major decisions in my life. My journey to understand my cultural heritage and what this means to me continues to this day.

Your grandmother was active in finding out information – including our family tree and developing a picture of how our family was affected by removal from land and family (i.e. this started off originally with an ancestor being 'stolen' by a sealer from Bunnerong country), dispossession and racist attitudes. I remember her being very angry by what she discovered and she was determined to share this knowledge about Australia's past by drawing on her developing knowledge about our family's history and sharing this with anybody who would listen. This included offering – and giving – talks to School groups. As you know your Nan is a wonderful woman who has been a major and positive influence in all of our lives. I think that her actions back then are an example of a strong influence on me to show courage to 'make a difference' despite the 'unpopularity' of an issue in her (and Pop's) life long quest to achieve social justice.

My mother wanted me to go to a Girls' school, despite Pop's protestations that the Public School system was just as good as the Private School system. Interestingly, this is an issue which is 'hot' in our house this year as we struggle to make the right choices for you (especially you Naomi in preparation for 2009!)

Your Nan won the day and I enrolled in Secondary School at Avila Girls College. I had a pretty good time at this School – although I have strong memories about Australian history classes and being read extracts from Geoffrey Blainey books where Aboriginal people were referred to in the past tense and as being 'noble savages', which pretty much disgusted me because I knew the truth.

But it was in Year 11 where I was forced to make a 'life changing' decision that helped shaped the recognition of my own worth and the beginning of independent thinking and making life choices. At the age of just 15 and a half (I was one of the youngest girls in my class) I had just finished Year 11 and some brutal end of year examinations which had been introduced in the school for the first time.

I found the whole examination process really stressful. My relative immaturity/youthfulness combined with having to complete examinations for the first time ended up having a negative impact on my end of year results. Whilst I certainly did not fail – my results were only average.

My mother and I were asked to meet the Principal to discuss my future. We went along – having no idea what we would be discussing. At the meeting was the Principal and the Typing teacher (which I thought was a bit strange) and basically I was told that a job had been lined up for me to start in a few weeks working with a friend of the Typing teacher doing a bit of modelling and

secretarial duties. I was told that this could be a fantastic opportunity (especially since I was so tall! and, that it was the best option for my future given that I would not be able to succeed in Year 12 given my Year 11 exam results (remember back then your exam results counted for 100% of your marks). I was told to think over the job offer and make a decision by the next day.

*It wasn't really that hard to make a decision. I think Nan was quietly freaking out about what I would decide – but she told me very strongly that it was **my life** and in the end it needed to **my decision**.*

Whilst she helped out with giving me some other options apart from leaving school – I needed to make this decision on my own.

Eventually I decided that I really couldn't see myself leaving school at just 15 – there was a whole world out there that I wanted to learn about! I decided to reject the offer and soon after I enrolled in what was known as an 'Alternative School' and did an alternative year 12 – called the Tertiary Orientation Program.

I ended up doing some fantastic subjects that really interested me – Psychology, Sociology and Drama etc. At the School, whilst there were a few other young people enrolled, they were mainly mature aged students enrolled with incredible life experiences to share and I developed many strong and supportive friendships. It was a great experience – and one of the first for me 'outside of my comfort zone'. Not only does it remain one of the most memorable years of my life – but my academic results were high enough to get entry into Swinburne University where I was told it was the best place to study Psychology.

*The message for you girls here is that sometimes you may have really, really strong (and powerful) 'external' messages that can influence your self perception and the choices that you make. They can be subtle or in my case blatant - and they can come from so called 'experts' or people in 'authority' or the Media that perpetuates stereotypes and myths about Aboriginal people. There is much pressure in this society to 'conform', to be 'compliant.' Sometimes in my case, people want you to conform to what they regard is in your best interests – which is a disguise for what's really about using you to serve their **own** interests.*

In my case, the courage to not conform to Avila's carefully laid plans that held the key for my future was not easy (part of me was enticed by an idealised lifestyle full of glamour and nice clothes!) but was a great early lesson in life about taking responsibility for your own life and recognising my own self worth despite the messages sent by the School that I was a failure whose destiny would be formed from leaving school and entering the workforce at the ripe old age of 15. My goal of going to University was achieved in the end – it just took a different route to get there than the one that I expected.

Studying at Swinburne was also a great experience – with lots of learning and also lots of fun! I probably should have done a bit more studying and less socialising.

There were three things that I want to share with you about this experience. Firstly, in studying third year Psychology I learnt about Dr. Abraham Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Human Needs' i.e. that there is a hierarchy of human needs that is not culturally-based and extends from our basic need to survive, through to our needs for security, social acceptance, self-esteem and the pinnacle of human need – to become 'self-actualised'. It was the self-actualisation that really interested me – it can be described as our desire for fulfilment – and the quest to become the best you can be by deciding what you want from life and then doing what is necessary to get it.

So of course I was really interested in this concept of self-actualisation. But it was after the definition was explained that I was really thrown and I'll never forget the moment. The Lecturer said that few of us in the class, if any, would reach the stage of self-actualisation. I knew then that I would do everything in my power to become one of the 5% statistic that he quoted – I would not be defined by statistics that determined personal fulfilment and it represented to me a fundamentally important personal quest and journey that I would actively work towards fulfilling – and I believe I have come pretty close to reaching it. I hope you too can be inspired by this...

Another critical incident occurred when I was involved in Student politics after I befriended a student in my Psychology class who was the President of the Student Union. At the next election my friend ran for President – I ran for VP – I was the only one to get elected from our ticket.

What this made me realise at the time is the quality that I have where I often 'lead from behind' by supporting and encouraging others. The actual outcome of this incident was that despite my agenda and efforts to support and help realise someone else's leadership ambitions – I inadvertently realised my own leadership capacity by virtue of getting so many more votes than the person they were intended for. It certainly was the beginning of an awareness of my own leadership style – certainly my preference for 'leading from behind' but also the awareness that you often can't 'manufacture' leadership. It also gave me some quiet confidence in my own leadership ability and that clearly – the different things I stood for at that election were very appealing to others – and that people were prepared to vote against the grain to mix and match their votes in different tickets....

An experience when I was a student and had to walk through a student lounge to get to my student union office and suffer the indignity of seeing 'soft pornography' (as sponsored by the Student Union) watched by many male students, represented a huge challenge for myself personally. I was influenced by my mother from a very early age about 'feminism' and knew that

I had a right to not be exposed to degrading images of women in my own educational learning environment and experience the leers and jeers of male students towards women as they walked through this public area.

As an officer bearer with the student union – I had the ability to raise this issue at the level of the Student Union and attempt to get these videos banned. When I first put forward a motion to get them banned – the motion was passed despite the different political allegiances of the other entire executive to me, this was a great victory and outcome – but the euphoria was short lived.

There was intense anger and resentment at this decision. So much of this was directed to me personally – I was personally attacked by fellow students many times. This grew to a more public demonstration of opposition when a group of students broke into the student media office and sabotaged the soon to be printed student newspaper.

These students replaced the centre spread with a centre fold version of a naked Helen Kennedy – by superimposing the body of a naked woman connected to a picture of my head! I can really laugh about it now but at the time it was devastating. Around 2000 copies were printed before the newspaper was recalled and copies shredded. What this taught me was the ability to take risks to advance something you believe in strongly despite the potential for decisions to be unpopular. I also had to very quickly inform/educate myself of issues around civil liberties, censorship and individual rights in order to arm myself with arguments to support my case. It is not enough to simply argue your case because you know you are right – I learnt very quickly to anticipate the oppositional view point and prepare points of argument against them!

*It also taught me the need to be resilient and strong in the face of criticism and attacks. I think I had one day which I spent in bed feeling sorry for myself and refusing to go to class. After that I knew that I needed to 'bounce back', get on with things and not be deterred by the actions of a misguided minority. At this time what also helped me get through this incident was the support of family. I actively sought out their support – and I hope that the two of you never hesitate to reach out for family support because that's where real unconditional support makes you strong and of course – remember that **no one** will ever love you as much as your family does – your grandfather taught us all that !*

Another experience during this time that has stayed with me was sitting at one of the first meetings I have ever attended and just being awe-inspired by the way in which the Equal Opportunity Officer was able to express her words so confidently and articulately. I was asked if I had anything to say and completely froze. I felt totally out of my depth. Whilst it is a feeling I have had since then, I still remember thinking that I wanted to grow up and be just like this woman!

I hope that you will seek out in your life those who you regard are your role models – there are plenty around – and try to keep clear of those who aren't. This is something that I have tried to do and it really does add more to your life and they are a great source of support and strength.

Unfortunately my daughters, you will also need to come to terms with dealing with death and the loss and the grief that comes with it. As you know, coming from such a large family and being so connected with the Aboriginal community generally, death never goes away. I myself in the last decade alone have lost many close friends who were also community role models – many in their 30's. This loss has a personal as well a community impact and takes its toll. It is important for you to consider three things. Firstly, you need to be very mindful of your own health – much premature death is preventable. Secondly, reach out to others when dealing with grief and loss – you will never be alone and others will be a source of great comfort. Thirdly, be aware of the risks of masking your pain and self medicating. You don't have to look far in your own family to see the outcomes of this – it doesn't work.

Finally – as you know, you are very important to both your families and the broader Aboriginal community. You are very fortunate to come from families with proud histories of demonstrating leadership and courage in fighting for social justice generally as well as for your own community. This is something to be very proud of and I am sure you will continue to contribute to this legacy. Whilst you are already so strong in your identities, I hope you continue to learn about who you are and understand that despite the consequences of colonisation today (such as not being able to speak or write fluently in Yorta Yorta language) you are part of a rich diverse cultural base that will continue to evolve through efforts of many of your extended family, including your own brother and sisters as well as your many cousins and of course, your aunts and uncles. Whilst the complexities of this may provide you with grief and frustration from time to time, you will continue to be enveloped by it with love, wisdom, warmth, humour and nurturing and it will sustain you.

In the true spirit of the cycle of life, as I write these last words, your first baby nephew - and first grandson to us - has just been born.

I want you to know that despite 'normal' maternal worries about the state of the world you are inheriting, I have every confidence that you will continue to pave the way for the next generation like your nephew Robert Junior will after you. You will walk proudly in the footsteps of your ancestors, just like your ancestors have done for many thousands of years. Importantly, I know that you will do this in your own inimitable ways and style!

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Introduction

1.1 Overview of the research

In this research, I have explored how my life experiences and my leadership journey have informed my professional practice in Indigenous capacity building.

My key research question is:

How have my life experiences and my leadership journey informed and developed my professional practice in Indigenous capacity building?

To explore this question I have undertaken research in three key areas:

- A reflexive analysis of my own leadership journey
- The development of a capacity building model based on interviews and focus groups undertaken with participants of the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd (VACSAL) Koorie Community Leadership Program
- An analysis of Capacity Building Projects within the Indigenous community

The research is presented as an exegesis with an accompanying Product. The Product consists of a collection of artefacts sourced from my professional work in Indigenous community capacity building together with key learnings from my research, including the **Model of Key Characteristics of Indigenous Capacity Building through developing Indigenous leadership (p. 22)**. The Product will be available as a Training Resource Guide for use in education, training and community settings.

1.2 Background

This research is predicated on the valuing of personal and collective voices, on two case studies reflecting these voices and on an analysis of Capacity Building Projects within the Indigenous community. This introduction starts with my personal voice which describes the history and context of the research.

The development of this research has its history and roots in the phenomenal success of the VACSAL Koorie Community Leadership Program – of which I was a key architect – as well as its Program Coordinator from 2002 to 2004.

For me, the experience of being immersed in a program that literally transformed the lives of many Indigenous people was extraordinary. From all my experiences in Aboriginal Affairs to that point – nothing had been as satisfying or successful. The program literally transformed some people's lives, there were discernable positive outcomes and we were involved in a cutting edge program that was pushing new boundaries.

I was very concerned to see that this program was able to be sustainable – and hoped to see it eventually grow into a Statewide Koorie Leadership Program. My motivations to achieve this were strong and I wanted to undertake research that would demonstrate the value and importance of investing in leadership development and its contribution to Indigenous Capacity Building that would be undertaken from an Indigenous perspective. There was a real opportunity to use this research as a platform for growing our future vision of this program from beyond the usual 'pilot phase' so typical of Government programs in Aboriginal Affairs and demonstrate that the return of an investment in Indigenous leadership development was significant.

As well as this I was also aware of policy development in Aboriginal Affairs and the increasing requirement by Government to have an 'evidence base' for the development and expansion of programs. This research would be able to assist

in realising all of the agenda above and would facilitate the necessary process to strategically position the program for the future and secure its sustainability.

During this time, I also started to become very reflective of my own life experiences and leadership journey and recognised that I was sharing many of the experiences of the leadership participants. There was a certain level of discomfort in this feeling as my perception of myself then was very much that I was a 'behind the scenes person', who helped make things happen by translating other people's vision into action. In many ways, my role and place was very much separate from the participants. I was also lacking in confidence myself and underrated my abilities generally, including my contribution to this program and the Aboriginal community, despite any views that may have existed to the contrary.

Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances and a combination of factors, before the end of the third consecutive year of the program running – the Leadership program was essentially dead. A major contributing factor was a decision by Government to discontinue funding this program beyond the initial 3 year pilot phase.

Regardless of our accolades and external recognition, even corporate and philanthropic organisations could not support us in our efforts to continue.

As you can imagine, this was completely devastating from a personal standpoint, not to mention from the perspective of our graduates, community leaders and Elders and many of our families.

For a significant amount of time, processing this was difficult and distracting and it had an impact on my research process. I considered changing the research focus so that I could somehow address what I believed to be part of a 'hidden agenda' to uncover the 'real' reasons for discontinuing such an important initiative. Perhaps we could 'get even' by using my research to demonstrate the contradictions between stated Government policy in Indigenous capacity building and the outcomes of this program! Eventually, I realised that any

modified research I did would still have currency, and that the research from the leadership participants is still important, still has currency and can certainly add value to what is now a changing policy environment given the recent Commonwealth election and a new Labor Government. It took a significant amount of time to process this.

As well, for the next two years, I became involved in many different projects that I would not normally have the opportunity to work on – including many outside my comfort zone and skill base out of necessity. Following on from this, I took on a senior management and leadership role in a major peak Aboriginal community health organisation. My life and formative experiences, before the Koorie Community Leadership Program, during it and after it, had all contributed to this watershed moment where I had for the first time taken on a significant leadership role in the Aboriginal community.

So, what did this ultimately mean for my research? My rich and thick data collection processes had been completed well before the finale of the VACSAL Koorie Community Leadership Program and an enormous amount of work had been done collecting case studies and semi-structured interviews. The question was how can this be best used, given the changed environment?

I decided that there were obvious synergies between my own life experiences and leadership journey (my own personal data), which had radically 'stepped up' since the leadership program and those of the participants (participants' data) in the leadership program.

This research has ultimately constructed an Indigenous capacity model that is supported and validated by data from both the participant's data and supported by the efficacy of my own personal data.

It will provide a major contribution to the growing amount of work on Indigenous capacity building and recognition of the integral role of leadership development in this context.

In the words of educator and activist Professor Mick Dodson AM – as presented to an Inquiry into Capacity Building and Service Delivery in Indigenous Communities

There are no quick fixes to voids in leadership and governance in any community.... My concern is to convey the primacy of leadership in the community capacity building debate. Leadership requires different skills in different circumstances. Leadership requires activities that are collaborative, innovative and which build networks across sectors, and leaders must have strong community support.... Leaders require nurturing, coaching and supporting. Leaders need exposure to experiences which build skills and role models to inspire and drive change. (Commonwealth of Australia 2004, P.135).

1.3 Context of research – why it is important

Outlined below are some reasons why this research in the area of Indigenous leadership is of such critical importance.

The current Indigenous population is rapidly growing. More than half the Indigenous population is under 25 years of age (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006).

With the projected further expansion of the population, there is a need to invest in the leadership development of the younger population base. The importance of this cannot be overstated. As described in the first ever national concept study into the importance of Indigenous leadership development, leadership development is critical to the future survival and growth of Aboriginal communities (Cranney, M. & Edwards, D. 1998).

The current leadership base in Indigenous communities in Victoria is ageing rapidly and the mortality levels of the Koorie population – with the ages of the current leadership base – are high (Commonwealth of Australia, 2006). There

are just not enough people on the ground that have the necessary confidence, knowledge and vision to drive the social, health and economic agendas of the Aboriginal community and of government.

From an Aboriginal Affairs policy perspective, State and Commonwealth Governments are increasingly pursuing regionalised approaches to Indigenous social, health and economic development. The success of these initiatives will be clearly dependant on the ability of local Indigenous leadership to respond. Further, this situation is exacerbated by the fact that many of the current key leaders in Aboriginal Affairs are in their fifties and sixties (ibid.) and action is needed to nurture a future leadership base.

Extensive research in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies (Wilson, 1997) indicates that significant numbers of Indigenous people are still suffering the debilitating effects of colonisation and past government policies to the extent that their capacity to participate in social and political life cannot be realised without significant support (Taylor, 2003, p.6).

Participation of Indigenous people in mainstream leadership programs is low. For example, in Victoria, in the first ten years of the operations of the prestigious Williamson Community Leadership Program, only one Indigenous person completed the course, out of a graduate base of approximately 250 people. (Richard Bluck, Director, Leadership Victoria, personal communication, 15.08.1997.)

As I noted in the Vic Health, Promoting Indigenous Leadership Project (2005) p.39

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Institute of Studies 1998 report, 'Indigenous leadership: a concept study,' significantly represented a watershed in Aboriginal Affairs because it asked thousands of Indigenous peoples throughout Australia what their communities most needed.

It clearly demonstrated the need for a range of leadership programs to be developed to meet the particular and unique circumstances of Aboriginal people at national, state and regional levels.

Research undertaken by VicHealth has highlighted that Indigenous leadership projects and activities encourage personal growth, enhance self confidence and build self esteem in individuals, which in turn enhances mental health and well being and strengthens communities. (ibid.). Apart from this research, there is currently no research available about the efficacy and outcomes of Indigenous leadership programs undertaken in an Indigenous context in Australia.

Finally, while not necessarily reflected in allocation of resources, in my experience, in all areas of Indigenous affairs and policy development, leadership has been identified as a priority.

1.4 Definition of terms – Indigenous capacity building and leadership

Indigenous capacity building is a term that has enormous currency, and is also highly contested, in debates about Indigenous policy as a vehicle to overcome Indigenous disadvantage. In many ways the focus on capacity building has largely arisen in recognition of the failure of many past and existing Indigenous service and policy frameworks. As well as this, there has been increasing pressure for Governments to develop 'new solutions' to address the failure to bridge the gap in Indigenous life expectancy which continues to lag even further behind progress made by comparative Indigenous groups overseas (Corn, D. and Gardiner-Garden, J., p.3).

The term Indigenous capacity building in many ways attempts to provide some new thinking to address these issues and is increasingly being reflected in policy approaches within and across all levels of government in Indigenous issues. Ultimately however, and disturbingly, there is no commonly agreed definition of what capacity building is, a limited empirical research base and no

agenda for progressing capacity building in a 'whole-of-government' and holistic manner.

It is generally agreed however, that capacity building must aim to improve the quality of life for Indigenous Australians to increase their life chances and opportunities.

Outlined below is a definition of capacity development from the United Nations followed by a brief discussion highlighting the links between this concept and Indigenous leadership and the brief presentation of my strengths-based concept of Indigenous capacity building. As well, more discussion on Indigenous Capacity Building is provided in the Literature Review.

The UN Commission on Sustainable Development (p.3) warns that

Capacity-development, like sustainable development, encompasses a wide range of aspects including the human, technological, organisational, financial, scientific, cultural and institutional...Capacity development is the 'the process and means through which national Governments and local communities develop the necessary skills and expertise to manage their resources in a sustainable manner within their daily activities.

Of particular significance and relevance to this project, is that the term 'capacity building' can and should be referred to as 'community strengthening'. This recognises that communities come with many existing strengths, assets and capabilities. Further, capacity building is about "regeneration of our communities from the inside out – communities renewing themselves by identifying, appreciating and using their assets." (Dodson, M., p.6).

In my own research, I have developed a construct of Indigenous capacity building which demonstrates that there are three key integral and interrelated components of Indigenous capacity building through leadership development. They include:

- Intra-personal capacity building (i.e. an increase in self-confidence and self awareness, cultural identity and healing from the impacts of colonisation).
- Inter-personal capacity building (i.e. an increase in the building of networks, quality relationships, pathways to further education and training).
- Community capacity building (i.e. an impact on the development of a stronger Aboriginal community through contributing towards a stronger and broader Aboriginal leadership base and stronger governance arrangements).

It is a concept that continues to evolve. Of most significance for the purposes of this research, is the importance of recognising how leadership can contribute to Indigenous community capacity building. Research and thinking on Indigenous capacity building cannot be considered without examining the issue of leadership.

It is important to reflect on what I mean by the term 'leadership' given its relative centrality to my research question. To me I accept the definition of the concept of leadership as being the ability to influence a group toward the achievement of goals (Robbins, 1994).

As further elaborated in the 'Literature Review' no one individual has the skills, attributes and knowledge to undertake community capacity building. Leadership requires different skills for different circumstances and activities that are collaborative, innovative, that builds networks across sectors and have strong community support.

2. Literature Review

This section provides an overview of relevant literature specific to leadership theories as well as to Indigenous Leadership. It builds on the previous introduction to Indigenous capacity building.

Whilst there exists an enormous amount of general (or mainstream) literature and research on the nature and aspects of leadership, this is contrasted with a paucity of specific empirical research and meaningful data in the area of Indigenous leadership in a contemporary context, particularly in Australia. (eg. Calliou, B. (2006)). In contrast, there is relatively more research available internationally, particularly from Canada – a country which shares some similarities and synergies in terms of its history and cultural values.

This lack of Australian Indigenous research is expected to change over time, primarily as a response to a raft of Indigenous leadership programs that have been newly developing over the last seven years. These have been developed as a consequence of what has described as a watershed report in Aboriginal Affairs (Kennedy, H. in VicHealth, Building Indigenous leadership, p. 39). In 1998, a survey conducted with thousands of Indigenous people throughout Australia highlighted that what their communities most needed was a range of leadership programs that could be developed to meet the particular and unique circumstances of Aboriginal people at national, state and regional levels.

Importantly, it is necessary to note that despite some stereotypes that may exist, there is no one model of 'Indigenous leadership' that can be deconstructed, just as there is not a standardised Western leadership model. In the Aboriginal community historically, leadership and activism have been synonymous. Today, whilst there is still clearly a need for this type of activist leadership; Indigenous leaders require a range of skills and abilities across all areas for different situations.

The Leadership Contingency Theory purports that the most appropriate leadership qualities and actions vary from situation to situation. Further, its effectiveness depends on the leader, follower and situational factors. This theory has some relevance as further explored below. (G Manning and K Curtis, 2003 p. 23)

Leadership contingency theory is useful because it attempts to create a fit between the leader's style and situation. This is relevant because it tells us there is no best leader behaviour across all situations. A developmental perspective approaches everyone as having leadership potential that can be learnt or developed. It focuses on the process of leadership development not on the leadership itself by continually responding to circumstances and opportunities whilst searching for and reflecting on the lessons learnt. In many ways leadership theory has focused on individual traits, actions, follower's characteristics, situational aspects and individual learning or development. These western views of leadership, whilst clearly not suggesting they don't have any merit in an Indigenous context, do however view the relationship between leaders and subordinates in a rather narrow, hierarchical and mechanistic sense.

Servant leadership has been regarded as a leadership theory that has some close synergies with Indigenous leadership models. This theory developed by Robert Greenleaf is about a calling to 'serve' and is not about personal ego or material rewards. It is about a true motivation to serve in the interests of others. This particular theory is also adopted by many community leadership programs internationally. As one leadership textbook explains, "a sure sign of servant leadership is the leader who stays in touch with the challenges and problems of others. One good way to do this is to get out of the executive suite...out of the ivory tower and into the real world" (ibid. p. 122.)

Significantly, one of the few research projects undertaken to identify any differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leadership has highlighted that whilst the model of servant leadership comes closest to any models

describing Aboriginal leadership, it is also much more than this - especially in the way in which servant-leadership is interpreted.

This particular Canadian research project highlighted that

Aboriginal leadership is about meeting the needs of the entire community, about connecting with ones past and having a deeper appreciation that the actions of the leader will have an impact for several generations in the future. Good leadership is about learning about your clan, learning about your responsibilities in the community, and doing that and that's considered leadership (Julien, M., Wright, B & Zinni, D.M).

This research also highlighted a number of 'marked' differences in perceptions of how Aboriginal leaders viewed their role compared to non-Aboriginals. This included viewing leadership as more holistic and egalitarian and seeing the person as a whole, having a more indirect communication style. They also described challenges such as walking in two worlds and the tall poppy syndrome (ibid).

Clearly however, Indigenous models of leadership are based on cultural frameworks and holistic approaches as well as individual differences and styles.

Indigenous Australians have been described as having markedly different leadership styles to non-Indigenous Australians. As described in a document that has reviewed the efficacy of a number of diverse Koorie Community Leadership Projects (VicHealth p. 24):

Leadership has traditionally been characterised by having Elders in cultural guidance roles; group and community contributions to governance and decision making; consensus decision making systems; and an awareness of and being responsive to community needs without prior reference to ego or power-driven motives.

They draw on the wisdom and experience of older people and integrate the spiritual with the political.

Father Tolowa, a Torres Strait Islander community leader, describes this as the following:

In our culture, a good leader is one who walks out the front and his people follow. A great leader is one who walks beside his people with them. But the greatest leader of all is the one who you will never see (VicHealth p. 24).

What this is essentially saying is that good leaders do not have to be in the spotlight. In effect, what many Indigenous people would understand effective community leadership to be – working with people, being one of them and working together. Once again, this highlights the different emphasis away from Westernised hierarchical theoretical underpinnings of leadership theory.

Contemporary leadership styles do not always reflect this ideal. In today's society, our leaders find themselves working in a context of rapidly changing social, economic and political environments, and have had to adapt their styles to suit such complexities.

Russell Taylor, former Deputy Chairperson of the Australian Indigenous Leadership Centre and Principal of AIATSIS has developed his own thinking around this important topic after many years of being involved in providing leadership himself at local community levels – including developing a suite of Indigenous leadership development programs.

In Russell's view, the nature of leadership that is required to address these changing circumstances is a

leadership that will challenge us to face our problems in ways which honestly assess the reality of our community situations – and our values

– and which mobilise our communities to develop new approaches to community problem solving (Taylor, 2003).

Significantly, Russell contends that the model of leadership that is most associated with Indigenous people – such as the charismatic, heroic, leading from the front, motivational or visionary model of leadership is proving more elusive and problematic. Importantly, he explains that these types of leadership models tend to create unhealthy reliance and dependence on specific individuals rather than on the community as a collective and tend to devalue the supporting structures and processes available within the community. That is not to suggest that these leaders have been ineffective. Rather, that new and more innovative approach to leadership and to leadership development is required.

This type of leadership that takes account of the shared and contested nature of Indigenous leadership is best described by Heifetz. As Heifetz has stated

instead of looking for saviours we should be calling for leadership that will challenge us to face problems for which there are no more simple, painless solutions – problems that require us to learn new ways.. and we need a different idea of leadership and a new social contract that promotes our adaptive capacity (Heifetz, R.,1997, p. 3).

The concept of shared and contested leadership also refers to leadership being applied by a number of people – from multiple positions – rather than defining leadership as applying to a position of authority or even as a set of personal characteristics.

The adaptive capacity in this context refers to the development of the organisational and cultural capacity to effectively address community problems in ways which are consistent with cultural values and which involve two distinct elements of leadership.

This 'adaptive capacity' has much resonance to me personally as well as to my experiences in our own Koorie Community Leadership Program. These two elements are described below:

- 'Technical and adaptive problems' – this involves the capacity of leaders to employ different modes of action to deal with both routine challenges and those more complex problems where innovation and learning are required. Whilst one could argue that this sits closely with situational leadership it focuses on the imperative for innovation and learning
- 'Leadership and Authority' involving a leadership framework for assessing available resources and, depending on whether one has or does not have formal authority, developing leadership strategies to mobilise community action

Importantly, this approach requires innovative thinking and 'adaptive work as highlighted in some examples below:

- A recognition that as a model, shared and contested leadership is effective and healthy;
- A recognition that people who may not hold formal positions of authority can demonstrate and contribute to leadership (referred to as multiple positional leadership)
- Encouragement of leadership that is respectful of diversity of views and conflict
- Being not just concerned with survival, answers and vision but also changes in community values and community action
- Emphasis on the need for leadership to consider the pace of adaptive work – that is the need for leaders to 'capacity build' or to prepare people to do the necessary work and difficult challenges at a pace that they themselves feel is acceptable.

So what of the links between Indigenous Leadership and the literature around Indigenous Capacity Building? I believe that the two are inextricably connected. Any discussion around Indigenous capacity building needs to recognise the importance of Leadership as a fundamental and necessary component.

Significantly, in 2002, in response to the growing importance of this new policy term and imperative in Aboriginal Affairs, a Government Inquiry was established as an "Inquiry into capacity building in Indigenous communities". (House of Representatives, 2002).

The terms of reference of this review included the need to encapsulate the critical "ingredients" of capacity building. One of the key findings of the review was the need to recognise that capacity building relies on a holistic approach, tackling issues at the Indigenous community, Indigenous organisations, and Government levels simultaneously and to reaffirm the link between robust communities and the well being of Aboriginal people.

Professor Mick Dodson explained to the same Government Inquiry into capacity building the way in which leadership needed to be considered a significant part of Indigenous capacity building.

*There are no quick fixes to voids in leadership and governance any community.... We all know that few are born leaders. ... Leadership must be culturally sanctioned and transferable into wider environments.
(Commonwealth of Australia, 135).*

This statement made above by one of Australia's most eminent and respected Indigenous leaders certainly provides some clear direction in this.

It highlights that the development of Indigenous leadership is of such critical importance to Indigenous capacity building that it can no longer be ignored or downplayed when scoping, developing or indeed implementing any Indigenous capacity building initiative.

Whilst traditional forms of Indigenous governance and leadership has served communities well, as Taylor describes (p12)

there has been an assumption that for too long that effective Indigenous community leadership will some how be present and /or will appear

without having to make any specific investment in its outcome..... such leadership will not necessarily occur as a result of some natural osmosis or local succession.... Leadership has to be the focus of specific attention in any capacity building exercise – and involves two main purposes: to enhance the capabilities of existing Indigenous leaders and the creation of a larger pool of Indigenous leaders available from the community.

3. Methodology

My research methodology is based on a qualitative research paradigm and a case study methodology has been used in responding to all three key areas of my research, although clearly there have been some different approaches as identified below (Stake 2000; Yin 2003). Outlined below is a description of the actual research methods adopted that have informed the three key areas of research. This is followed by a review of the methodologies adopted.

3.1 A reflexive analysis of my own leadership journey (Case Study 1)

In providing a reflexive analysis of my own leadership journey, the methodology adopted has been a case study approach. This has been achieved by using reflective writing, journaling of experience, autoethnography and an Indigenous methodology known as Dadirri (eg Ungunmerr-Baumann 1988).

The methods of gathering data on my own leadership journey have been:

- An autoethnographic account of my Aboriginal history, which documents my background and history and is an integral part of shaping who I am and what influences me.
- A reflective journaling process through writing a letter to my daughters, Naomi and Stella, that provides an account of major life experiences particularly in my formative years.

- An overview of key professional roles I have had in the last fifteen years in Aboriginal Affairs – with reflections on how this has informed my practice in Indigenous capacity building. An essay prepared for a Master of Business in Administration course which provides a leadership and management profile has been a source of information for this. As well, reflective journaling has been undertaken in response to each of these key roles to further demonstrate how my journey and experiences has contributed to the development of my Indigenous capacity building framework.

3.2 The development of a capacity building model based on interviews and focus groups undertaken with participants of the VACSAL Koorie Community Leadership Program (Case Study 2)

The methods of gathering primary data in my research were:

- Semi-structured and open ended interviews held with five graduates from each of the two years of the program intakes in 2002 and 2003
- § Two focus groups with the same research participants, one group from 2002, and one from 2003 (see Appendix Two).

In the individual interviews, I began with a general question and then followed up with the more specific questions about leadership. Trigger questions within the interviews included:

- How did the leadership program have an impact on your personal development?
- In what ways do you think the program has had an impact on the leader within you?
- Can you describe the types of networks that have been established between you and others that weren't there before?
- How has the program influenced your capacity to network?

Importantly, I asked the participants to differentiate between their own personal development and their styles of leadership development and the perceived impact this has had on particular capacity building determinants. These might include increased networking capacity and involvement in community governance systems.

I undertook a thematic analysis of the findings (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 1995) of the ten individual interviews and presented these findings in the two focus groups. This served the purpose of validating the interview data and extending the exploration of capacity building in the Indigenous context.

The research participants were approached on a random basis to determine their interest and availability as well as the year in which they completed the VACSAL Leadership Program. The gender of participants was six females for the individual interviews and 4 males – which largely reflected the gender composition of the leadership program more generally. The focus group discussions were similarly represented by the same gender profile.

Research participants were drawn from an equal number of graduates who completed the program in 2002 and 2003. Focus groups were conducted and taped in a relaxed setting in a regional area. Each of the research participants who participated in the interviews and focus group had completed their program either within one or two years prior to this taking place and were mixed together.

Importantly, the timing of these interviews further supports the validity of the data as this allowed for time to elapse for reflection and perceptions to be tested 'in the real world'. This research would not have this credibility without this intentional time-lag. Clearly however, if the interviews had been conducted within two or three years of course completion, the findings would be even more reliable given the interest of the research in ascertaining the 'sustainability' of the Indigenous leadership and capacity building determinants.

Ethical considerations were of paramount importance in this process. Research participants who agreed verbally to be involved in the research were provided

with a signed letter and statement from the author that clearly outlined the nature of the research, the research process and a request for permission to tape record the interview.

During the focus groups this added to a richness of shared experiences as half the people in the focus groups were able to share their experiences, with similar experiences and the same themes emerging, despite the fact that the research participants completed the program over different years. This is significant, because whilst the program was structured the same over the two respective years, different speakers and topics were covered and of course, group dynamics developed that were unique to the respective year group.

3.3 Undertaking an analysis of each major Indigenous capacity building project that I have been involved with in the last seven years

This has been achieved by undertaking a desk top analysis of seven key projects and provides an itemisation of perceived leadership skills derived from the involvement in each project (see Table One p. 79)

3.4 Reflections on research methods adopted for the two case studies and desk top analysis

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) map out the way in which qualitative research has evolved through seven stages. It is the seventh stage or moment of research that is described as 'emancipatory', which is seen as being culturally situated, critical, and hopeful. It is also described as still taking shape.

This has particular resonance to my research as Denzin argues that those in the seventh stage are working in congruent ways with their communities (Denzin 2003:122) and have a commitment to not only describing the worlds but to changing it. Importantly, the use of story-telling and listening is highly

valued – which has been described as a recognition of the importance of family and community dialogue.

The case study approach has been purposefully used to gain in-depth, realistic and holistic accounts from the two case studies. Clearly there are limitations of this research that need to be taken into account by the researcher.

In relation to the first VASCAL Koorie Community Leadership Program Case Study, a clear recognition took place for the potentially problematic nature of subjective bias.

As a researcher who has continued to be closely connected and associated with some of the research participants, the potential existed for the research participants to make comments that they may have felt was what the researcher wanted to hear. In recognition of this potential bias, a clear statement was made at the beginning of all interviews by the researcher that highlighted the need for participants to recognise their own potential (even unconscious) subject biases towards me – given my strong association with the subject nature of the research the participants could have been unconsciously motivated to provide answers they thought I would want to hear.

Autoethnography – often associated with case study social research has also been appropriately used as an important part of documenting my cultural background and social history. This has been described by Ellis as writing which

conveys the meanings you attach to experience. You'd want to tell a story that readers could enter and feel a part of. You'd write in a way to evoke readers to feel and think about your life and their lives in relation to yours, you'd want them to experience your experience as if it was happening to them (Ellis, 2004, p.24).

Once again, it is necessary to acknowledge that this research process is a blatantly subjective one – however and importantly, all texts and reflective

journaling has been purposefully contextualised in documented events and activities.

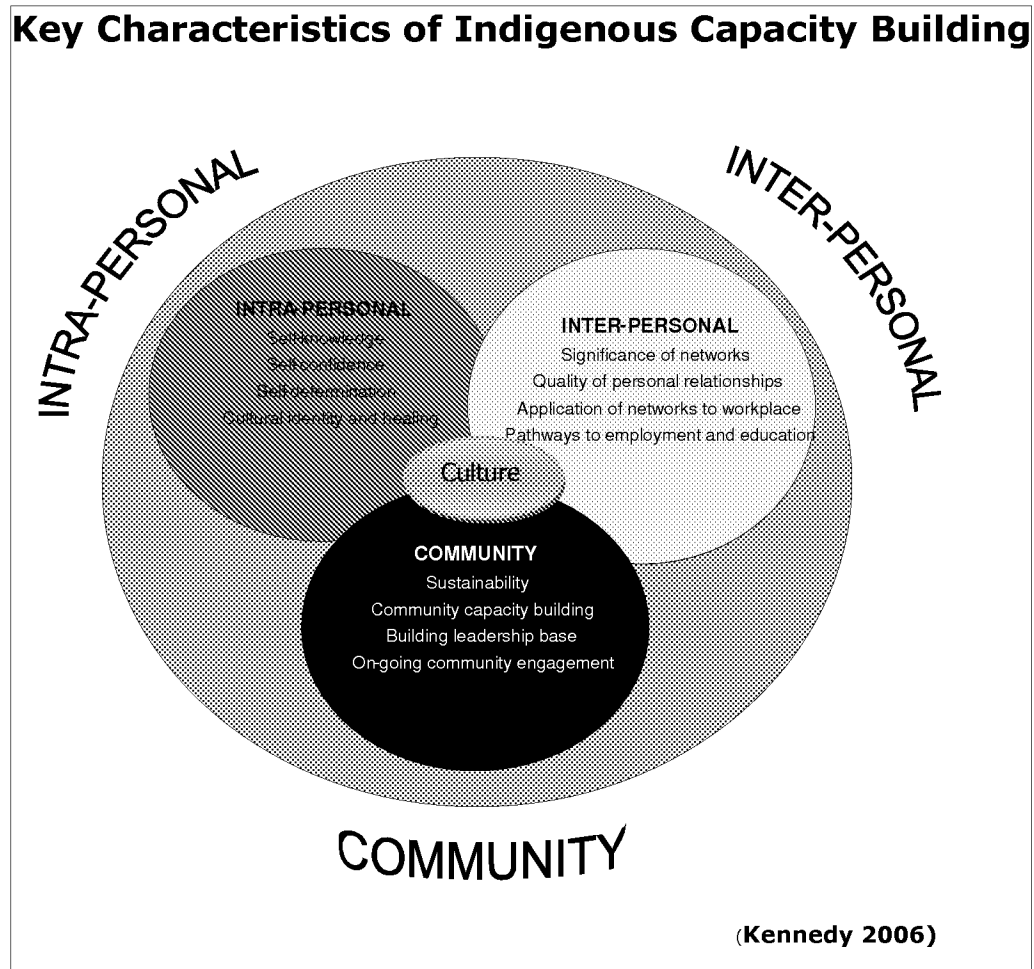
The concept of listening as a researcher in the context of the two case studies as well as my involvement in Indigenous capacity building projects is in many ways a cultural construct, and has had deep resonance with me throughout this research process especially.

The concept of Dadirri (Ungunmerr-Baumann, op.cit.) is an Australian Indigenous term which refers to quiet and respectful deep listening – but which is much deeper than just listening with your ears. It is metaphysical in nature and acknowledges and embraces the use of all senses. Importantly too, it recognises that listening is patient and indeed is an important and respectful Aboriginal cultural practice. In this exegesis it is used also in a reciprocal way – in the giving and sharing as is a common Indigenous gesture.

4. Research Findings

I have chosen to report the most important finding from my research, the development of an analytical model of the key elements of Indigenous Community Capacity Building, up front, because it underpins the structure of the Case Study reports. Using the model outlined below as an organising principle, in this chapter I will present the learnings from the case study data mirroring the model's components.

4.1 Model of Key Characteristics of Indigenous Capacity Building through developing Indigenous leadership



The most significant finding of my research is the development and construction of a model which describes the key characteristics or determinants of Indigenous capacity building through developing Indigenous leadership. This model has been validated from interviews and focus groups undertaken with participants of the VASCAL Koorie Community Leadership Program and is supported by the findings of my own research which has examined my own life experiences and leadership journey.

The model demonstrates that there are three key integral components of Indigenous capacity building through leadership development. They include:

- Intra-personal capacity building (i.e. an increase in self-confidence and self awareness, cultural identity and healing from the impacts of colonisation).
- Inter-personal capacity building (i.e. an increase in the building of networks, quality relationships, pathways to further education and training).
- Community capacity building (i.e. an impact on the development of a stronger Aboriginal community through contributing towards a stronger and broader Aboriginal leadership base and stronger governance arrangements).

Importantly, these components are interrelated – and the efficacy of the model highlights that no one area of capacity building can be addressed in isolation.

My experience as well as my research supports an understanding that community capacity building is about community strengthening, in recognition of the existing capabilities and assets of communities, in contrast to the deficit view that so often accompanies critiques of Indigenous capacity building.

This knowledge is continuing to evolve, reflecting the increasing understanding that successful community building needs to involve all parties that impact on a community.

4.2 Unpacking the model – the importance of ‘culture’ as the permeating centre of the model

Firstly, it is important to highlight the significance of using the word ‘culture’ as it is at the core of the circle and embedded in the model.

It is not something that has been singled out as ‘part of’ or an element that ‘contributes to’ the model. Rather, it is used here centrally to describe how it informs and imbues every element of intra-personal capacity building, inter-personal capacity building and community capacity building determinants generally and also denotes the significant interaction between all three layers. You cannot have one without the other. It is the common denominator shared by all three layers and is critical towards achieving Indigenous Capacity Building. It is also a driving factor as well as a permeating influence and context for both the research participants and the researcher. It is implicit as well as explicit.

As Russell Taylor describes, “culture informs and legitimizes conceptions of self, of social and political organisation, of how the world works and of how the individual and group appropriately work in the world.”(Taylor, 2003, p 9).

The latter is validated by the way in which the research has highlighted ‘healing and strengthened cultural identity’ as being a key characteristic of inter-personal capacity building that has informed this model. Importantly, we also know from recent and emerging research, particularly from Canada, that “‘culture’ is a form of treatment” (Chandler, 1998) and increasingly recognised as a ‘protective factor’ (VicHealth, op.cit.).

A further example of this is the way in which culture has influenced the researcher. All throughout the data of the researcher, there is constant reinforcement of the importance of my culture, and clear descriptions of the impact that this has had on the researcher that extends to every facet of my life.

Some examples will be provided later to further illustrate these research findings.

4.3 Intra-personal capacity building

Significant findings were made in relation to what I have described as 'Intra-personal capacity building'. This represents a cluster of similar, yet interdependent characteristics that combined together, contribute towards building stronger 'internal' capacities as a necessary 'strengthening' factor and one which helps build 'resilience' and are all essential leadership qualities.

Perhaps not surprisingly, research participants reported and described significant increases in their self confidence and self knowledge or awareness, as well as strong sense of reinforcement of their cultural identity – including their place in community, a sense of 'healing' – particularly from the impact of colonisation broadly and the development of a greater sense of personal strength, self determination and resilience. Importantly, these themes were reinforced when research participants were also asked to reflect on the same questions in relation to other research participants/graduates of the program. Some comments from the research participants are provided below:

It made me realise that I am a leader and that I do have a lot of skills

It gave me confidence and built my self esteem – and grounded me in terms of my place in the community

It helped me come back to reality and in touch with it again

It made me determined to get to where I want to go

The concept of 'healing' also featured strongly in this research. One participant spoke about his experience of family violence that was something he kept to himself for 30 years. He talked about how he was able to open up about this

and essentially begin a journey of healing which has, since then, included counselling. He discovered that he was traumatised by the experience and is forever grateful of the experience, safe space and trusting environment that allowed his healing to begin.

This healing was also acknowledged as a necessary pre-cursor to true empowerment and capacity building. As one research participant identified:

We can't help anyone unless we heal ourselves. The healing part is about those issues we don't talk about anymore, because you are supposed to be grown up and because in reality we have all suffered.

This person also went on to say that 'we still share the pain and it is a relief to share this.' Another one talked about how she could not believe that she would be so comfortable showing her emotions – whether it was joy or pain.

Others spoke about the how the healing part was 'really hard'. This included the whole gamut of conversations, the issues, what was spoken about and the collective nature of hurt – 'we hurt as a group' 'we all felt it together'. Some recognised the relief in knowing that they were not alone in thinking like this and that everyone felt the same.

For me as well, the concept of self awareness has been an important and on-going theme in my life and has been described in much detail in this research. It goes back to significant moments (as described in my letter to my daughters) when I was actively encouraged by my School Principal to leave school early at 15 to basically work in a factory. Despite all attempts, I was able to recognise my own self worth, despite external messages and continued on at school (a different one) and succeed enough to go on to University.

Another major incident describes a time early in my career where not being able to manage my emotions had a direct impact on the development of a poor outcome for something that was very important to me and to Aboriginal Education. Not being able to understand or have the tools to know how I could

have managed this situation better was the source of so much frustration for many years.

So much so that when I was involved in the leadership program, perhaps not surprisingly, one of the stated major areas participants wanted out of the leadership development program - was managing conflict and improving self confidence. Whilst sometimes presenting on these topics myself, participating through mutual learning on topics such as emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, presentation skills – where there was so much engagement and active learning - was more than empowering. All of these areas also emphasised the importance of listening – with a focus on *Dadirri*.

Fortunately, as validated by this research in terms of significance, I have been able to continue to promote intra-personal capacity building in the Indigenous community through self-awareness through running professional development on topics such as emotional intelligence, Belbin Team Role Preferences, Understanding Conflict and the Group Dynamics. Next time I do this – I will also promote my research findings in the context of the interrelated importance of inter-personal networks and how the two constructs are connected.

As part of my reflexive analysis of my own leadership journey, my research also describes significant periods of low confidence and the questioning of my own abilities and contributions towards making a difference and the contribution towards Indigenous capacity building and community strengthening.

Fortunately, by understanding that self awareness includes understanding your strengths and weaknesses, I have been able to apply this in many ways. For example, my research describes how when I completed a mainstream leadership development program – one of my biggest learnings was the need to develop more confidence and skills in management competencies. Importantly, from this program I realised that good leadership and management go hand in hand. I was certainly not at that stage prepared for a key leadership role because of this weakness.

In recognition of this, I completed some studies as part of an MBA at RMIT, which included developing my own leadership and management profile and action plan and undertaking some diagnostic tests. This has proved extremely useful and is an on going reference in my development (see Appendix 1). As one example, I was able to complete a Belbin Team Role inventory some years ago that highlighted to me very strong natural preferences in two specific areas and extremely low scores in all other categories. What this highlighted to me was a propensity to not being adaptable. Since then, I have made a conscious effort through this 'self knowledge' of addressing my weakness of remaining in particular comfort zones.

Another final example that is validated by much of my research is the issue around achieving 'self-actualisation' as described in my letter to my daughters. For many years I was professionally responsible for working 'behind the scenes' with some comfort and certainly not being comfortable being on the front line and having been given the authority to provide real leadership. Peter Drucker describes this as a critical moment, when you question whether you produce better results as 'decision maker' or 'advisor' (Drucker, P. 1999).

For me, my growing self confidence and ability to improve a range of skills have been major contributors that have informed my professional practice in Indigenous capacity building.

Your power to choose the direction of your life allows you to reinvent yourself, to change your future, and to powerfully influence the rest of creation (Covey, 2005)

4.4 Inter-personal Capacity Building

Inter-personal capacity building is a very important determinant in the context of achieving Indigenous capacity building because it assists existing and emerging leaders to be able to connect to and draw on each other's strengths for support and mentoring which assists with emotional well being and community

strengthening and capacity building. As well, the research highlighted the ability to learn from each other as well as to lean on each other through the development of high quality supportive relationships.

On both of these measures, the research provided support for the quality of relationships developed and the development of strong and accessible networks. The significance of the latter is pronounced for two reasons. Firstly, the research supported the notion that the relationships between each other were characterised by trust and mutual respect – a recognised important value which has much cultural merit.

Secondly, the quality of the relationships and networking opportunities are applied in peoples' own professional and community environments to create new service and advocacy linkages – thus enhancing Indigenous community capacity building. As was articulated by one emerging leader

Before the program I didn't have a real network that I could call upon. Because of that I had a lot of real uncertainties and insecurities around a lot of stuff in Aboriginal Affairs. Now I can call on people.

This is an important imperative given that Aboriginal Affairs is well known for being a difficult and complex area to work in as well as being immersed in an environment often characterised by fragmented services and lack of coordination.

The networks, quality of supportive relationships and bonds achieved between individuals and communities also ultimately improves social and community connectedness. Much research also exists to support the 'protective factors' and 'community strengthening' that occurs when there is increased social connectedness (Vic Health, op.cit.).

When talking about the high quality of relationships, research participants used words such as 'solidarity together', 'tight bonds and life long bonds' and a 'sense of unity'. One participant spoke about the way in which he seeks out

other graduates when experiencing personal problems because he knows the support will be there.

In terms of networking – one person described its significance as the following:

The networks were one of the best things. We all know what we are doing now – and who may not be working and need support, and that support is given even to them now.

For myself, I have clearly developed many significant and quality relationships as well as networks that make 'getting things done' in terms of contributing towards Indigenous capacity building easier for the same reasons described above in relation to the complexities involved in working in Aboriginal Affairs. Being involved in the VACSAL Koorie Community Leadership Program has also meant that I too have many more networks that I can access. Indeed, evidence of this has been the ability to recruit some of the graduates of this program to where I currently work.

The research also supported pathway development to further education or employment. Numerous examples were provided to demonstrate research participants making career advances or changes and/or undertaking further education. For many of the research participants, this was a significant achievement - that their work, personal development and achievements made through doing the program had been recognised in meaningful ways. This included remuneration and career advancement. For others, the opportunity and space to learn and grow and consider their 'place' in the Aboriginal community, was a spark to assess/re-visit where people wanted and/or needed to be.

For me, all of the research findings regarding inter-personal capacity building determinants through the interviews and focus groups with the research participants have resonance.

My research is a summary of the ways in which I have been able to contribute towards inter-personal capacity building through my life experiences and leadership journey.

I have demonstrated that the quality and strength of the relationships I have been able to develop have assisted and promoted my development throughout my entire leadership journey and that they have been fundamental in terms of – accepting me for who I am, encouraging me to find a place in the Aboriginal community and supporting me in my quest for ‘self actualisation’ which I continue to become closer to in reaching, teaching me to listen more and making me feel connected and recognising particular strengths and abilities that I did not know I had.

The confidence that I received from being involved in the leadership program has sustained me in many important ways. My research has highlighted how, despite setbacks after the discontinuation of the Leadership Program, I was able to draw on a reserve of confidence that I had as a legacy from this program and its success. Despite many obstacles and attempted sabotage in the transition into a new and major professional role, I was able to effectively manage the conflict and ride the storm that consequently has since provided major benefits. My research describes in different ways how I did not think I had the abilities, sense of support and validation before this – and much of this was derived from the quality of relationships with others.

I have also shared stories and examples of the many mistakes I have made in my life journey and professional work. I have reflected that some of these can be attributed to as a consequence of my shortcomings as a ‘Transformational and Charismatic Type’ – so that I continue to have challenges with ‘appearing impatient and domineering’ and can ignore and suppress my own feelings (Podsakoff, P.M. & Fetter, R. (1990)).

My experiences through the leadership program and exposure to so many different current and emerging leaders and Aboriginal Elders have

contributed towards an acceptance and entrée into the community whereby I now have the confidence and a degree of authority to advocate on behalf of Aboriginal community health organisations.

In terms of pathways, as my research has supported, the networks I have developed and the quality of relationships I have been able to create and sustain, have assisted me to improve my professional employment opportunities as well as further education opportunities, as borne out by me completing my Master of Education.

4.5 Community Capacity Building generally

This research has provided significant support for the achievement of 'community capacity building' (or strengthening the Aboriginal community) through the development and integration of inter-community capacity building, along with intra-community capacity building – with 'culture' at centre of the core.

This was highlighted by the research in a number of important and significant ways. Firstly, the research supported that the quality of relationships and networking was significant enough to sustain Indigenous Capacity Building or put another way, would be sustainable in the longer term. Of central significance were the recognition of the need and value to work with different family groups and the recognition that as a group, the research participants represented a future leadership base that will have an everlasting effect.

There was recognition that because many people had already passed on that would have been part of the community leadership base, there was some urgency that the research participants needed to be part of the bigger picture, making history like their forebears. This was reinforced by a strong sense that there were now some clear expectations of the research participants – that they had signalled their intent to 'step up' publically in full view of Aboriginal Elders and a broad range of community leaders:

people know what to expect of us now – and so we expect more of ourselves.

It was also acknowledged that the effects may not be immediate and come to fruition straight away. These effects were described as having an impact and ‘flow on effect’ on the research participants’ individual family groups through to identification that many of the research participants could indeed be the next Prime Minister, or become Ministers and politicians.

Validation provided to the research participants by Aboriginal Elders and leaders had a huge impact in encouraging the research participants to self identify as emerging leaders and to counter the ‘shame’ factor in ‘stepping up’. Most research participants acknowledged the critical importance of their role in validating and recognising their leadership qualities and contribution to building a stronger community. As one comment was made

they taught us that we’re valid – the future of this community. That’s amazing.

This was also supported by the mix in age groups and all the support and encouragement provided to each other. One person made the comment that he knew eventually that he would have some type of role in the community – but that he didn’t think that being a young leader was something that he would be able to do, and that the program had validated that he could become this.

As well, the research supported ‘on going community engagement’ as a major capacity building determinant – and evidence was provided to support examples of new or enhanced involvement in community governance (eg as Director/Chairperson of Community Cooperatives), re-engagement after periods of non-involvement as well as guidance and support on ways to contribute to community capacity building and become more involved in Aboriginal Affairs.

Whilst recognising that the research supported the concept of sustainable benefits being felt in the future, there were many research participants

interviewed who had already commenced new roles contributing in voluntary capacities toward community capacity building.

The research participants and existing/emerging leaders were provided with the opportunity to create and forge new relationships with other existing/emerging leaders – thus helping to build and sustain an emerging leadership base for the future. For example, one research participant said “it helped us associate with different family groups – we found out the connections that our different family groups had in the 70’s and 80’s.” There was a real recognition that this was assisting political and cultural traditions to be able to be continued and that the research participants had been handed the baton (to use a sporting metaphor) to keep those important links and networkings to ensure a strong and supported leadership base for the future.

At the same time however there was the need and ability of the research participants to move beyond being ‘defined’ or ‘pigeonholed’ by virtue of kin relationships.

Before the program I was always known as Dad’s daughter. I’m getting my own profile now thanks to the leadership program.

At the same time the research also validated the concept that when you provide people with leadership opportunities, not everyone is going to take on the mantle and ‘step up’ regardless of whether this is achieved in the context of the family context or a broader political leadership role. As one person stated – people were given the opportunity to assess just how interested they were and whilst at the end they thought it was great, they now think it’s not really for them.

As well, the research highlighted that you cannot always ‘pick’ who is going to be a leader, and that a number of the ‘quieter’ participants that you would not associate taking on a broader leadership role in any setting – have done exactly that!

The following statement best represents much of the research in terms of the general contribution to capacity building and creating a new leadership base for the future

The impact that the program has had on our leadership has got to be positive. It has and will strengthen our resolve to play a bigger and more important role in representing our people. I can only see this getting bigger and better; we are only just being let out of the box.

and also

We have all got different things out of the program – but we all want the same things and that is to be reconnected back to who we are.

Finally, these research findings are also supported by the outcomes of an independent evaluation conducted by Professor Collin Bourke from Monash University who concluded the following

The VACSAL Leadership program has been an outstanding success in developing a state wide leadership cohort, which will have a major impact on Victorian Aboriginal Affairs in the next decade. (Vic Health, 2003)

For myself, all of the issues identified previously are relevant and have resonance. Drawing on the data from my own case study however, I have outlined below a summary of the ways in which I was able to contribute towards Indigenous capacity building through building a stronger leadership base, ensuring sustainability and contributing towards engagement with the Aboriginal community:

- Validation provided by Aboriginal Elders, leaders and the research participants also, of my role in the community and my own particular leadership qualities and abilities.

- Significant development in my own career progression where I have made a transition from being in a comfort zone for some time and have now 'stepped up' to take on a senior management and leadership role at a major peak Aboriginal Health organisation.
- Provided major contributions to community strengthening by being involved in a range of community projects that include the VACSAL Koorie Leadership program.
- Continuing to foster and invest in the leadership development and potential of Aboriginal staff who I am responsible for managing; and restructuring to create better career paths and opportunities for Aboriginal staff.
- Continuing to draw on the strengths and abilities of the research participants by recruiting some of them for senior roles in the organisation I work for and actively seeking them out whenever I believe there are opportunities they may be interested in.

5. Case Study One. Helen Kennedy: a reflexive analysis of my own leadership journey

5.1 Unpacking the model – the importance of ‘culture’ as the permeating centre of the model.

It is very important for me to examine or ‘unpack’ how the term ‘*culture*’ - a concept placed firmly at the centre of my capacity building model - has been critical towards informing my professional practice in Indigenous capacity building.

Indeed I describe below how the *cultural base* of my own leadership journey has been informed particularly by the various components of ‘intra-personal capacity building.’ This includes how my own self knowledge and awareness of my Aboriginality has been the biggest single influence on my professional practice as well as me generally. As I describe in my ‘Letter to my daughters’.

My Aboriginality has shaped my development as a woman as well as my values, my career, my humor, my friends, choices in partners and many of the major decisions in my life.

Some key reflections that I have explored in some detail includes the ever present inspiration and strength that I receive from the legacy of my own past descendants and their many sacrifices to counter attempted genocide and assimilation practices by successive governments.

Another significant reflection focuses on the development of a growing self confidence in my own Aboriginality in the context of defining ‘who I am’ and ‘where I fit’ in the Aboriginal community. I have described some of my own personal challenges relating to my own identity being so strongly associated with the identity of my husband and my journey in discovering my own niche in

a sense. I have also reflected on the irony that my own involvement in the VACSAL Koorie Community Leadership program really provided me a much stronger self confidence and stronger basis for future involvement in Aboriginal Affairs. With regards to inter-personal capacity building, this growing self confidence and growing sense of ease around my Aboriginality and associated place in the community has developed and consolidated existing quality and trusting relationships and networks. For me, this has also meant the confidence to take some major risks in my professional journey. This includes departing from the relative safety of working with and for my own extended family in education and community services to a new area of Aboriginal health – with completely different community politics and challenges.

5.2 Intra-personal capacity building (i.e. an increase in self knowledge, self-confidence and self awareness, cultural identity and healing from the impacts of colonisation).

Reflections of my own leadership journey have highlighted the significance of self awareness – which includes the pivotal nature of how my own cultural base, heritage and identity helps shape who I am as well as being the source of growing self confidence. As I understand and unpack my own history, I grow stronger in the development of my cultural identity, a sense of healing as a result of greater acceptance within the Aboriginal community and the development of a much stronger sense of 'self' generally. This includes better insights into my strengths and weaknesses, better emotional intelligence and increasing activity and commitment to the necessity of self determination as the pathway for Indigenous capacity building.

All of these attributes represent a cluster of similar, yet interdependent characteristics. Combined together, they contribute towards building stronger 'internal' capacities that is a key major dimension towards Indigenous Capacity building.

5.2.1 Self Knowledge: Knowing who I am – honouring my cultural heritage

I am a proud (paternal) descendent of the Trawlwoolway people of North East Tasmania and the Ben Lomond Tribe (Plangermaireener Nation). On my mothers side we are of mixed Anglo-Irish ancestry.

I identify strongly with my Aboriginality, as also described in my 'Letter to My Daughters'.

In the context of my own self knowledge – it is important to state the following facts, as they continue to have an impact on who I am.

- Tasmania experienced the first and biggest brunt of colonisation, making the full impact of genocide and assimilation policies less recent in Australia's history
- That the brutality of the way in which this occurred is barely comprehensible, yet largely unknown to many Australians as the real Aboriginal history is still largely untaught in schools
- That my descendants have invariably been survivors and/or victims of colonisation/genocide and assimilation policies as warriors, sex and slave fodder and later - as a black people hidden behind a façade that emphasizes respectability or acceptability
- That it is because of this history and some of the relative life advantages I have experienced – especially educationally, that I am motivated to 'make a difference' in overcoming Indigenous disadvantage. I feel an enormous responsibility to do with this and enormous nourishment in doing what I believe is my purpose in life

There continues to be long held myths in relation to the perception that Tasmanian Aborigines were effectively 'wiped out' and 'extinguished' by colonisation/genocide. This mythology has also served the purpose of

reinforcing stereotypes about Aboriginal identity which continue today (Windshuttle 2002).

A number of historians such as Reynolds (1995), Ryan (1996) and Gough (2001) have done much work in more recent decades to review evidence/historical records to counter and dispel these myths about the nature and fate of Aboriginal people.

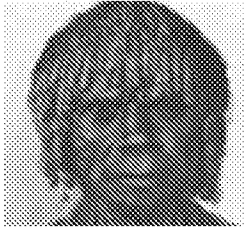
Analogies have been made by between the attempted genocide to exterminate Tasmanian Aborigines and Jews in Germany in the 1930's and 1940's. This analogy however does not end there. There is a clear mythology that Truganiani was the 'last' Tasmanian Aborigine. If one follows Jewish history closely, we can see that in Germany, people inter-married with people from non-Jewish descent. Whilst this may have led to some changes in religious and cultural practices – they have still retained their Jewish heritage.

Despite the holocaust and attempted genocide of Jews, we don't say they have been exterminated. Yet, there exists the often repeated mythology about Indigenous people.

Having said that, I have elected to provide a story of Manalargenna below – (so called) Chief of the Ben Lomond Tribe. I am providing this because it is his story – as well as those after him, that have provided me with a much honored legacy which gives inspiration and strength. He was a true warrior and leader. I am one of his descendants and I wanted to give his story a direct voice as well.

At home I have a framed portrait of Manalargenna that takes a central pride of place. In this picture, you can clearly discern a strong and proud man carrying a fire stick.

According to the text on my framed portrait at home, Manarlagenna is described as the following:



Leader of the Trawl-wool-way people of the North East, he was widely respected as a shrewd and intelligent man, and an extraordinarily brave warrior. He was also famous as a 'clever man' who could communicate with the spirits and heal the sick.

As a young man he witnessed the European invasion of his country and the abduction of many of the women in his family by sealers.

For over 30 years, he fought the invaders, leading raiding parties against bands of sealers and settlers' homesteads.

By 1830 he had worked with George Augustus Robinson, helping to persuade Aboriginal people to come in from the bush. In return, Robinson promised him that white men guilty of atrocities would be brought to justice, that women stolen by sealers would be returned, and that Aboriginal people would be able to remain in their own country.

These promises were all broken.

Manarlagenna was sent to Flinders Island in 1835. En route he cut off his hair, emblem of his status and tribal membership. He died one month after arrival, and against his family's wishes was buried in a Christian grave. No songs were sung for his spirit. (Source – Collection, Tasmania Museum & Art Gallery).

Australia's relatively recent history - post colonisation, means that the racist attitudes and stereotypes informed by genocide and assimilation policies continue its imprint in the attitudes of people today. Most recently as an example, a cab driver who picked me up outside our work offices asked me if there were many Aboriginal people in Victoria. I replied that there were about 30, 000 Aboriginal people living in Victoria. His response was to laugh and say there are no real Aborigines in Victoria – the people I was talking about were mongrels. I decided that I would not waste my time and energy on getting angry

with this man – I had a more important meeting that I needed to be composed for. I did however just make the statement – *you see what you want to see*.

I have had this experience hundreds of times.

5.2.2 Developing Self awareness and Self Confidence

- **Working for Government in Aboriginal Affairs**

For approximately 7 years I worked for the Victorian Public Service in a key role in Aboriginal Education coordinating adult education programs. This position provided me with much personal learning and education. I learnt about Aboriginal Affairs from a state wide and Government perspective and also learnt how to respect community protocols from within Government. Most importantly I learnt about myself and developing an ease about who I was and where and how I fitted in.

I was completely inspired and worked probably harder than ever before because my acceptance in the Aboriginal community was extremely important to me.

This position also provided the biggest learning curve for me in all respects. It was the beginning of the development of some great relationships with extraordinary people – and my experiences (often from trial and error but also mentoring from many) has provided me with a solid foundation for all of my learnings and work today – both in working with Aboriginal communities, organisations and with government.

Later on of course, I experienced a major crisis with regards to whether I was best suited to working in government and whether I needed to learn more about myself and the community by working in the Aboriginal community controlled sector.

- **Undertaking mainstream leadership development program –
*Williamson Community Leadership Program (1998)***

Primarily out of boredom at work, I was interested in applying for the Williamson Leadership Program and was lucky to get accepted to this pretty prestigious program – full of the so called crème de le crème of emerging Industry leaders!

The most important outcomes from doing this year long intensive program were the following three things:

- **Need for me to develop and improve on management competencies and skills**

That I personally needed to develop and improve in the areas of management functions, competencies and skills before even considering taking on any type of significant leadership role in an organisational context.

- **Growing in confidence – ‘cutting the mustard’**

That exposure to the speeches and presentations made by luminaries/high fliers during the program (all providing off the record and often candid reflections about their respective leadership journeys) instilled an increased confidence in me and my own abilities. In fact whenever asked – what is the most you got out of this program – I would say – “an increase in self confidence”. I realised I could ‘hold my own’ even though I didn’t necessarily have many of their skills. This recognition was a major catalyst towards undertaking further management studies.

- **Recognising need for the Aboriginal community to have its own leadership program**

That the Aboriginal community needed to develop its own version of such a program – and that this could potentially form part of my next adventure if the opportunity presents!

- **Undertaking management studies (RMIT MBA) – Was I an advisor or decision maker?**

Upon reflection, this chapter in my working life reminds me of what Peter Drucker describes as a critical moment when I needed to question whether or not I produce better results as a 'decision maker or an advisor'. (Drucker, 1999). In some ways I was better suited as an advisor, but it stayed with me that maybe this could be changed later on.

5.2.3 Self knowledge/self determination

- **Recognition of need to work in Aboriginal community controlled sector to undertake an apprenticeship**

In the early years of working for the public service, I maintained that I would never work in the community controlled sector because there were '*too many politics*'!

Some years later, I was at my most miserable working for the public service at the same time as a funding opportunity emerged to develop a Koorie specific leadership program! This was after I had completed my leadership program as previously described. I had known for some time – that despite my interest in the relative safety and comfort zone of the public service, I really needed to undertake an 'apprenticeship' in the community. Whilst slow to progress, this revealed itself the more I learnt about myself and my strengths and weaknesses.

It was not long before I had offered my services to a major Aboriginal community organisation to work with them on developing a project proposal with the purpose of this organisation designing and delivering their own community based leadership program targeted at emerging Koorie leaders.

This was the beginning of what became a period for employment with this organisation of 5 years and set the scene for this research thesis. Of course the major feature of this five year period was working for the VASCAL Koorie Community Leadership Program as part of an extraordinary and dynamic team. This program was run for three consecutive years and has served a major impetus to this thesis topic.

- **Self knowledge – knowing yourself well enough to understand your comfort zone**

Significantly – there was a period of time working for the public service where there had been a shift in my work being more ‘strategically and bigger picture focused’...I was a lot more comfortable with the new emphasis on being strategic – which the previous arrangements did not seem at the time to encourage or maximise.

This analysis would also be in accordance with the Myer Briggs score of ENTJ. This score indicates a leadership style that is very comfortable with the ‘bigger picture’ and providing a ‘long range vision for the organisations (Myer and Kirby, 1994, p. 31). This may also conform to the demonstration of ‘behavioural components of a ‘Charismatic Leader’ – particularly in relation to very high scoring of a ‘strong articulations of future vision and motivation to lead.’

- **Recognition of lack of skills in dealing with conflict**

For a twelve month period I held a role as the acting manager of a large Koorie Teaching Department for a TAFE Institute. The entire time was spent navigating issues arising due to conflict between myself and another person who had effectively been demoted because of my appointment!

The situation was exacerbated by my inability to effectively manage the conflict that had existed, which ensured that I was never able to institute/demonstrate the leadership to enact many of the changes and development that I had visualised/articulated. This inability is also attributed to difficulty with enhancing and effectively integrating all five key functions of management as described by

Collins, (planning, organising, controlling and coordinating) as well as some of the principles of leadership that I would aspire to, i.e. 'Helicopter Thinking' (Collins, 1993). Analysis and reflection of this experience also enabled me to recognise that recruiting someone into a role that they are not yet capable of performing effectively is counter productive. I feel fortunate that I had developed the self awareness necessary to realise that my so called 'failure' in this role was not external attributed to circumstances outside of my control. I could have continued to pursue similar key leadership and management roles after this and kept some delusion about my suitability of these roles.

- **Self confidence**

An important lesson I learnt at the time during this major conflict as described above, was the need to be comfortable in my own skin and not try to be someone you are not. Whilst this seems simple and logical, at the time I don't think I really had enough self awareness (including understanding my weaknesses) and self confidence to have insight into this.

One of the things I did at the time was try to seek out advice on how to best 'manage' this communication process through a third person who had much more authority and influence than myself. I kept seeking out advice on the best ways to 'persuade' this person, including the actual words I should use. I spent much time rehearsing this...

Needless to say this was a disaster trying to negotiate something myself by drawing on five peoples different styles, perceptions and approaches! So instead of using my own 'words' and my own comfortable 'style,' my dealings with this person were featured by a culmination of a range of other peoples perceptions and approaches – and yes their 'words'.

It was not until much later that I realised that I really needed to be comfortable in my own skin – and never try to take on some else's 'persona' – it does not work and is counter-productive. In fact – whilst I cannot be sure of this in hindsight, if I had tried followed by own 'intuition' and emotional intelligence, my

interactions and aims of communicating with this person may have been more successful. Needless to say – the outcome was a failure.

In more general terms – this experience whilst educative in many respects – really did put me off working in more of a grass roots setting – even if it was a role based in an educational environment.

- **Feedback from leadership participant recognising personal growth**

During the Koorie community leadership program we were all required (including facilitators) to write something positive about each person in the group. This was an activity I borrowed from the Williamson Leadership Program. Comments would be collated for collection in an envelope for each person to take home with them and reflect on whenever needed. For me one person wrote

This is not just a journey for us. I have watched you grow and develop in confidence through this year. ... Thankyou

I was completely taken aback by this and felt a bit self conscious! This was not supposed to be about me. More and more however, my role and the various hats I would wear in this program gave me recognition that my learning was just as significant as the participants of the program. I slowly came to recognise this for what it was.

- **Learning from mistakes**

Another major experience and major lesson occurred during the end of my time in the public service which was a catalyst for leaving and served to provide me with many important lessons.

I made a decision to 'leak' a confidential – albeit extremely racist – report that one of the mainstream education providers had written about a small Aboriginal

community. Leaking a government document is a clear breach of the code of conduct of the public service!

My rationale at the time was that because there had been such a (relatively recent) brutal relationship between the white population and local Aboriginal community that had culminated in the local community boycotting the mainstream education provider for decades – that this action would somehow be a positive ‘catalyst.’

I really thought at the time that there would be some positive benefits.

I had even rationalised this on the basis of the saying ‘it’s ok to justify compromising one set of principles for a higher set of principles’ (in this case – compromising a code of conduct vs racial harmony and importantly the outcome of achieving better access to educational opportunities by this large Aboriginal community!).

Whilst some of this did occur eventually – in hindsight I made a mistake and would not do this again. My mistake is not based on being found out and the informal disciplinary procedure that I endured from the then General Manager.

Rather my mistake was that I unnecessarily contributed towards continuing racial hurt and grief of a much respected and revered Aboriginal Elder by exposing her to these shocking comments made by this mainstream so called ‘educator.’ I have certainly learnt from the edict used in the health sector ‘*First do no Harm*’ – a principle that I now use and apply in everyday life. That should have been my overwhelming principle in this situation.

Luckily – I continue to enjoy a good relationship with this Elder to this day. After this incident, this particular Elder became one of the many strong and inspirational leaders that we were able to promote to the leadership program participants who shared her wisdom, knowledge and key message that the younger generation needed to ‘step up’. I still feel responsible for imposing unnecessary grief on this wonderful woman.

Perhaps paradoxically given the disciplinary action my then manager took against me after the 'leak' was traced back to me, was the fact that I was later offered a job working for her.

The lesson for me here again is that it is ok to make mistakes so long as you don't repeat them and can learn from them, and that you can redeem yourself.

5.2.4 Cultural identity and healing

My journey in relation to my cultural identity has not been easy. Outlined below are some observations shared in dot point that surmises some critical developments. This is followed by some reflections where I continue to unpack this.

Any ambivalence that I perceive from others toward myself in relation to my cultural identity is increasingly a source of less anxiety as I develop more self confidence and inner strength. I am less concerned or motivated by what anyone thinks of me, except for those who come from my own 'inner circle' of friends and family

- A perception that to some extent – whilst I have and may continue to be considered an 'outsider' in the Aboriginal community, this does not impede on my professional practice in Indigenous capacity building.
- A growing sense of ease within myself and my own identity and acceptance of me for who I am and the contribution I am able to make

I used to get frustrated by the fact that when meeting new people in the community, I am usually identified as 'my husband's wife.' – who incidentally is very well known and a key respected figure in the Aboriginal community.

Whilst always expected – it still used to be frustrating because I would think that everyone thought I was a 'gubbah' (whitefella) and at times I would almost over compensate for this in terms of gaining acceptance in my own right. Although this clearly lessened over time - this was also exacerbated – perhaps differently,

when I worked for my brother-in-law for over five years. Not surprisingly, my identity during this time (real or perceived by myself) was very much based and wrapped around my extended family.

Of particular significance in more recent years has been breaking down these perceptions by deciding to leave my professional work with this part of my family.

When I started my new employment at another major Aboriginal organisation in an area that has historically been influenced politically by a different family to the one I married into, there was much trepidation. I was leaving the comfort zone I had known for many years by going into a whole new area, where perceptions carried great currency. My whole identity was so strongly and almost completely associated with my extended family - that my own identity had become significantly diluted. Because of this and other factors, I felt very nervous that this new found 'independence' was a risk and there was the potential for failure.

This significant chapter in my professional life has now become a major milestone in both my personal life as well as professional work.

There have been two main challenges and obstacles in this journey. The first has been dealing with a sense that I had 'abandoned' the family who had played a key role in nurturing and investing in my development as part of what I described as 'my apprenticeship'. The second was the perception of many key and influential figures (as well as staff that I would be managing) that I was the enemy and not to be trusted, not because of who I was, but because of my extended family base. In a community so highly factionalised, whilst this perception was completely predicted, it was still difficult to not internalise.

My worst fear at this time was that I would be a failure in this new role (i.e. lack of support, lack of trust and lack of management skills and competencies) and then be in a no win situation – losing family support as well as broader community credibility. I really was relying completely on my own resources

without the back up of any family behind me, except the (largely) distrustful 'family' working environment I was going into.

Fortunately, however I did go into this with my eyes wide open and those closest to me – including my extended family – knew that I really did need to 'go out on my own'.

Whilst it has not been easy, it is one of the best decisions I ever made.

This has taken time. Including time for the many people outside of my comfort zone that I would not normally associate with or be connected with to accept me and develop trusting relationships. As one person said to me in more recent times – now you are just Helen Kennedy.

5.2.5

The Moon Birds of Big Dog Island

I wanted to reflect on the poem below because it so strongly resonates with me. It was written by the late Errol West – who was a significant leader, academic and influence in Aboriginal education policy at a national level for decades. He was also a cousin and whilst I did not know him very well, I felt embraced by him.

In the 1970s this young Tasmanian Aborigine, Errol West, wrote a moving poem, *The Moon Birds of Big Dog Island*, about the great gaping absence that was being a Tasmanian Aborigine:

Like dust blown across the plain are the people of the Moon Bird

And yet there is no one to teach me the songs

That bring the Moon Bird, the fish

Or any other thing that makes me what I am

(source: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2002/10/16/1034561211169.html>).

The last time I spoke to him before he died, we talked for some time about the racism that exists in Tasmania, and how he could never return to Tasmania to live because of this. This conversation provided an epiphany to me because I realized that despite cultural roots in Tasmania, I was part of a very large extended family kin structure in Melbourne. As well as that, I was also fortunate that I had some of Tasmanian relatives also living in Melbourne.

5.3 Inter-personal capacity building (i.e. an increase in the building of networks, quality relationships, pathways to further education and training)

Reflections on my own leadership journey have highlighted the equal significance of inter-personal capacity building as part of my development and how this is complimentary to intra-personal capacity building. I have highlighted how important the development of quality relationships has been to me in providing support, mentoring and wisdom. These relationships sustain my energy and are based on trust and mutual respect – each important cultural values which must be earned and are highly valued. I have also described the many benefits of working as part of a high performing team during the years of the Koorie Community Leadership Program – and how these relationships continue to flourish today which mutually benefits across our respective work in community capacity building.

These relationships I describe are not dissimilar to those found amongst the research participants. Benefits from these and other relationships and significant networks developed have also had an impact on improving my professional employment opportunities (ie. commencing MBA and MA studies as a direct result of my strong friendship with Dr Mark Rose).

The networks I describe as having developed have been instrumental in all the Indigenous capacity building work I have done. This is particularly important in

the context of Aboriginal Affairs because it is such a complex area to work in and navigate around.

5.3.1 Significance of networks

The significant networks I have developed over time as described below have also been a fundamental to my work and leadership journey.

- **Learning about networking in the mainstream (from Williamson Leadership Program)**

A key and glaring observation and learning from the Williamson Leadership program was the significant networking that occurs in the mainstream and the reliance on these contacts. This reinforced to me how marginalised the Aboriginal community was and that regardless of how connected many people in the Aboriginal community were – there were some major benefits to be had in terms of ‘Indigenous Community Capacity building’ if this type of opportunity was available.

5.3.2 Quality of personal relationships

In the Aboriginal community it is the quality and nature of respectful relationships that has been another necessary precursor in informing my professional practice in Indigenous capacity building. No amount of skills or knowledge will facilitate ‘making a difference’ in Aboriginal Affairs without the acknowledgement that at the core of any ‘business’ lies a personal relationship. It is the quality of these personal relationships that lies at the heart of Indigenous Capacity Building.

- **The importance of loyalty**

I have been raised in an environment that places loyalty at the highest of responsibilities. I have also learnt a lot about loyalty as being precursory to

quality relationships – and whilst this overlaps into intra-personal capacity building, a lot about myself when boundaries are pushed.

I have learnt to the detriment of one former very close friend especially that my integrity, loyalty and well being generally are compromised when I spend time with people who are negative about existing leaders and perpetuate gossip. For some time, the benefits of this particular friendship outweighed this down side that was an entrenched feature of this friendship.

However, being passive (complicit?) in this context became unbearable the more closely I worked with the very people my friend was criticising. The situation became untenable and whilst I continue to feel a great sense of loss from this friendship, this is one example of the price that is paid for working in Aboriginal Affairs, which can be vicious and toxic.

- **Quality relationships and mutual learning – developing interdependence with others**

My role in the Koorie Community Leadership program was as a program coordinator and one of the key architects of the programs design. This program was extremely successful in delivering on its stated goals and achieved innumerable awards and recognition at State and National levels.

One of the key ingredients behind the success of this program was extraordinary team created and complimentary mix of the people involved, who included Dr. Mark Rose, Linda Bamblett and myself.

In classic Bruce Tuckman (2001) terms, our team had all the characteristics of a 'high performing team' and achieved a state of interdependence and flexibility. We all knew each other well enough to be able to work together, and trusted each other enough for each of us to work independently. Our roles and responsibilities changed according to need in an almost seamless way. Our loyalty to each other and sense of morale remained high and we were all equally task oriented and people oriented. Because of this high degree of

comfort all of our energy was directed towards running the best leadership program we could, without unnecessary distraction.

5.3.3 Application of networks to workplace

- **Public service – developing networks and quality relationships across the State**

During my seven years working as a public servant, I felt incredibly privileged to be able to work closely and have regular contact with a number of Aboriginal Elders, community leaders and community members from a wide variety of backgrounds and communities right across Victoria and some over the border. This has served me well at a personal level well and has provided me with a solid foundation for all of my learning's and work today – both in working with Aboriginal communities, organisations and with government. These networks have also provided a solid foundation for later work during the Leadership Program and with Indigenous capacity building and have been a critical resource to draw on.

5.3.4 Pathways to employment and education

- **Commencement of further management studies - what I learnt about myself and my leadership journey**

As I have indicated elsewhere undertaking the Williamson Leadership program was beneficial, mostly because it highlighted the need for me to further develop management skills and competencies. A comment I made as part of developing a leadership and management profile as part of MBA studies highlights this as well as the reinforcing the importance of on-going education and learning.

The actual process of developing this paper has been extremely challenging and difficult but ultimately very useful and cathartic... This process has actually been of more tangible benefit in the short and long

term than specific leadership and management programs I have been involved in. These include the year long Williamson Community Leadership Program (1998) and an individualised intensive career-counselling program provided by Morgan and Banks (1999).

This activity provided me with a necessary introspective platform and process to consider some of my strengths and weaknesses – and was an important part of my leadership journey that has significantly informed my work towards Indigenous capacity building.

- **Importance of Investing in professional development**

At some stage during this period of time – probably when I did the Williamson Leadership Program and enrolled in an MBA at RMIT – I became very aware of the investment that senior managers at work were making in my development. Not a lot of people had the opportunities that I was given – and I was very conscious of this privilege and of making sure that I didn't waste any of it. There was a reason I had these opportunities to learn and grow and it was very important that I used this to my best ability in 'making a difference' for Aboriginal people. I continue to be very conscious of the benefits that this investment has had on my development and leadership growth and ensure I replicate this as much as I possibly can with others.

- **Developing my own leadership and management profile – a foundation for future pathways**

This work contains a useful journal where I was able to provide initial indications of leadership and management 'preferences and weaknesses'. I also developed an 'Action Plan' which outlined a range of underlying obstacles to competency development with a specific focus on intrapersonal barriers with references to specific underlying causes. I also undertook a range of diagnostic tests including Belbin's 'Team Role Inventory' (Belbin, 1981), Myer Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and 'Transformational and Charismatic Leadership.' Finally, on

the basis of this information, I prepared an overview of my current and preferred styles of both management and leadership (Appendix 1).

- **Transfer of skills from working in the Koorie community leadership program**

A major capacity building outcome for me came about because of the necessity to take on more significant facilitation and some teaching roles during the Koorie community leadership program – especially during times when Dr Rose was unavailable (particularly during PhD time!). This was not planned, but as it turned out because of the trust placed in me, I had no choice but to ‘step up’ – just like we were asking the leadership participants to do.

At that time, I did not have a teaching background or any formal training in facilitation. I was however able to undertake a Certificate IV in Training in the first year of offering this program – which provide some relief to my sense of having a lack of credentials etc. Without wanting to sound gratuitous I was actually offered a job to be a trainer at VECCHI by the trainer who taught the course. I really could not believe this when it happened, but it certainly made my confidence soar.

As my confidence grew in being able to do some of this and nerves eventually took a back stage, I slowly started to create and develop my own ‘topics’ that I presented on as well as providing facilitation. For example, I designed and provided some creative presentations on ‘self awareness’, ‘presentation skills’ and was also able to tap into my creative side and interests in preparing and designing a number of group team building activities as well as serious group challenges, debating topics and so on. It was never my intention in the early stages that I would take on this role – but out of necessity to fill in gaps and time and the need to ensure challenging and stimulating activities, I was able to develop not just confidence in this area but some real competence.

I really enjoyed this role and the great feeling of knowing you have engaged someone (often a disaffected learner with negative experiences of the

education system) and they have experienced the wonders of learning about themselves, their community and the world they live in.

6. Case Study Two. The VACSAL Koorie Community Leadership Program

6.1 Background Information – Development and description of the VACSAL Koorie Community Leadership Program

The Koorie Community Leadership program was a 'cutting edge' initiative that aimed to nurture an emerging generation of Indigenous leaders.

The VACSAL Koorie Community Leadership program was initially funded by VicHealth as part of its 'Emotional and Spiritual Well Being in Koorie Communities' program. This initiative aimed to 'address the challenges for the future survival and growth of Koorie culture, community and self-determination'. Commencing in 2002, it began as an initial pilot program to 'comprise structured innovative programs to provide opportunities for young Koories to increase leadership skills, and undertake leadership activities in their local community' (VicHealth, 2001).

The more specific aims of the project were to provide development and training to recognise, support and nurture current and emerging Koorie Leaders in the metropolitan region and some Victorian regional areas, drawing on the best of both Western and Indigenous knowledges. This project aimed not to 'teach' leadership but rather to help each participant to discover and unleash the leader within.

The stated aims of the VACSAL Leadership Program are to provide:

- A forum for Koorie leaders of tomorrow to share ideas, experiences and skills in the challenges facing the Koorie community in the future
- An examination of the 'big picture' issues in Aboriginal Affairs and the development of the capacity to address the 'hard' issues

- The opportunity to develop/improve a range of skills in personal development, leadership, communication skills, policy development, management and exposure to key Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders from a range of business, community organisations and government at a State and National level
- A program that is immersed in contemporary Aboriginal culture, which continuously reinforces cultural identity and promotes self esteem.

The program has been modelled to suit particular needs in the Aboriginal community. The initial planning phase included an examination of comparable Indigenous/mainstream leadership programs state-wide and nationally. What distinguished the VACSAL Leadership program is that it was designed by Koories, delivered by Koories for Koorie leadership and managed by a major Koorie organisation.

The program was delivered across the State and immerses its participants in different residential Aboriginal community settings outside of their comfort zones. Its participants were directly exposed to a range of community members/leaders and Elders from those communities and hear first hand the history, issues, challenges and opportunities in those communities. The program immerses its participants in Aboriginal community settings, reinforcing Aboriginal identity. Connectedness is a constant theme during the program and ultimately, an empowering factor for its participants.

Participants crafted their own curriculum, selecting from a broad range of topics. After the first workshop, participants are encouraged to own the curriculum. This extends to ownership of the program more generally as the program progresses. Participants are encouraged to be actively involved in the facilitation of sessions and most major decision making processes regarding the running of the program. The learning environment is designed to cater for multiple educational levels within the group, through experiential and collaborative mechanisms.

6.2 Outcomes of the Program

Outcomes achieved generally from the program – ascertained not through the data collection processes by informally – indicate the following outcomes achieved during or within one year of graduating from the program:

- Participants received credential from a Diploma in Community Services
- Over one third changed their employment or advanced their employment
- Some went on to further study
- A greater pool of volunteers became available for community events such as NAIDOC week and for Governance purposes (i.e. Elected or co-opted as voluntary Directors of Aboriginal Community Boards of Management)
- Five participants ran for ATSIC elections on a shared platform/ticket
- Several participants went on to participate in new national indigenous leadership programs
- Many participants were called on to speak at conferences and community forums on leadership and other community issues

Public Recognition of the Program

Since the Leadership Program's inception in 2001, it ran each consecutive year for three years. At the end of 2004, there were 60 Koorie graduates from the program. The program was independently externally evaluated throughout the year by Monash University who concluded the following:

The VACSAL Leadership program has been an outstanding success in developing a state wide leadership cohort, which will have a major impact on Victorian Aboriginal Affairs in the next decade. (Bourke 2003)

In 2003, the program received four major awards. The awards achieved include the following:

- State Training Award –***Most Innovative Training Program***

- Australian National Training Authority – ***Australian Training Initiative Award***
- Faculty of Business, RMIT – ***Excellence In Teaching Award***
- Vic Health – ***Excellence in Mental Health Promotion Award***

In 2004, the program also received recognition at the inaugural Wurreker Indigenous Education Conference for its outstanding achievements generally. This was a significant award because it came from one of our own Aboriginal community organisations – the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association (VAEAI).

6.3 Research Findings

My research set out to explore the impact the VACSAL Leadership program had on participants and the implications for Indigenous capacity building.

The findings that I believe are significant to my research are summarised below
In my own research, three major themes emerged

- Intra-personal capacity building (i.e. an increase in self-confidence and self awareness, cultural identity and healing from the impacts of colonisation).
- Inter-personal capacity building (i.e. an increase in the building of networks, quality relationships, pathways to further education and training)
- Community capacity building (i.e. an impact on the development of a stronger Aboriginal community through contributing towards a stronger and broader Aboriginal leadership base and stronger governance arrangements)

In the following sections I have elaborated and discussed each of these findings independently.

6.4 Intra-personal capacity building

Perhaps not surprisingly, research participants reported and described significant increases in their self confidence and self knowledge or awareness, as well as a strong sense of reinforcement of their cultural identity – including their place in community, a sense of ‘healing’ and a greater sense of personal strength or resilience. Importantly, these themes were reinforced when research participants were also asked to reflect on the same questions in relation to other research participants/graduates of the program.

6.4.1 Self Knowledge

Many of the research participants highlighted increases in their self knowledge in the context of the way in which they were able to reflect on themselves in a deep and profound way. In many respects, the term ‘self knowledge’ can be used interchangeably with ‘self awareness’ drawing on the definition of Stephen Covey – where the focus is on our capacity to stand apart from ourselves and review our history, habits, scripts etc. (Covey 2005)

The data provides insights into specific ways in which the research participants have developed self knowledge or self awareness, ranging from discovering the Aboriginal leader deep inside and that in fact many of the research participants were providing a leadership role from the time they woke up to the time they went to bed, to the realisation that the answers are not meant to be found within each individual – rather they exist within the community.

I realised you are not going to help the community if you are too busy listening to yourself

Another reflection that highlights one person’s journey of self awareness:

This program helped me step back and be a lot more reflective and think about the ways I wanted to see or do things in the future. The road I was

on before was pretty much about Westernised leadership – you know climbing the ladder of success. It's not that simple in our community – you need to be on the ground in the community.

This person also made the reflection that by observing and learning from others, he was able to look at how other people 'deal' with situations and better control impulsiveness.

I am better at managing my natural tendency to jump head first in to things and make rash decisions and with managing stress.

6.4.2 Self confidence

Again the data reported significant outcomes in improvements in self confidence, with the research participants recording that others had also recognised discernable changes. Most research participants recorded an initial lack of confidence and shyness which then grew. For many it provided the basis for being comfortable with public speaking for the first time, for others regarded as more 'background people' they 'came out of their shells' and developed confidence to be involved and engaged in discussions.

One young male shared the insight that he had a habit of doubting and questioning his ability at times and how 'other Koories can doubt your ability' and are 'always questioning whether you are up to scratch and can do the job'

My confidence levels in certain areas were lagging. Initially when I did the interview – I said that I wanted to give something back – you know you can take and take and then I thought I didn't have anything to give. Initially this was my thought. After a couple of months – it changed my way of thinking and I realised though I did have something to give – as opposed to previously thinking I had nothing.

At the beginning of the program I didn't have much confidence and couldn't say what I thought- by the end you couldn't shut me up.

With me – I have a habit of speaking up – and not necessarily relaying what I'm trying to say in an appropriate fashion. But it taught me to listen to other people's views a lot more.

6.4.3 Reinforcement of cultural Identity, and healing

The reinforcement of cultural identity was a comforting platform and basis for the research participants. It may not have been explicitly stated in the research findings, but was certainly imbued implicitly throughout the research findings. Having said this, one research participant commented

I didn't realise I had so much pride in my culture. And that it was so strong. Being in a group of 20 other Koories makes you realise you really do care and you want to make a difference – no matter which 'way' that is.

The issue of personal healing on the other hand, provided strong explicit statements, many prefaced with the view that this was not something that was expected but was an extremely important and invaluable benefit that was a recognised contributor towards developing a healthier and stronger community.

Some diverse comments from the data are provided below:

We can't help anyone unless we help ourselves. The healing part about to discussing those issues we don't talk about anymore – you know because you are all grown up, mature and because everyone has suffered. But we still feel the pain and it was great to share that and to know from some of our 'icons' in the community where we do come from.

The healing part was hard. Those conversations, issues –what was spoken about, we hurt as a group. If someone is hurt we all hurt and we all felt it together and gave each other encouragement.

I didn't realise I could feel so comfortable showing my emotions – whether it was through crying or showing joy. It was a great relief to know that I wasn't alone in thinking like this –that everyone felt the same.

6.5 Inter-personal Capacity Building

The theme of inter-personal capacity building also emerged strongly in the data and captured a range of external capacity building determinants such as an increase in the quality of relationships developed between each of the research participants/graduates and the many speakers and facilitators involved in the program.

This also extended to the significance of networks and the ability to apply this in everyone's work (predominantly in Aboriginal Affairs). As well the increasing opportunities for pathway development into further employment and education also emerged.

Importantly, these themes were reinforced when research participants were also asked to reflect on the same questions in relation to other research participants/graduates of the program.

Outlined below are some reflections from the data and a variety of quotes that were derived from the thematic analysis as part of the construction of my definition of Interpersonal capacity building.

6.5.1 Significance of networks

Research participants recognised the significant networks that were developed and further, how important the right networks were in 'getting things done' and contributing to Indigenous capacity building.

Significantly, it was also recognised that, in highlighting the diversity of the Aboriginal community and backgrounds of the research participants, there were many people who did not have established networks in the Aboriginal community. As one person said

there were people with extraordinary leadership potential who just don't have the networks for various reasons (i.e. wasn't raised in Victoria/raised outside the Aboriginal community etc). They were provided with the networks or community links that they need in order to 'shine' and show their true potential.

Another example was provided in the context of another person who had shared some really negative experiences when she tried to gain acceptance in the Aboriginal community. Consequently and over time, this person was 'accepted' and actively encouraged to get involved and keep going. Since then – this person went on to be the elected chairperson of her local community organisation.

The networking comes with a little more authority – perhaps it translates as just myself being more confident. This gave me the ability to know that you can network with people, whether you agree or disagree with what they think on issues, and you can get beyond that – and that's something that we really need to work on, because we do come to grief on various issues where we don't want to work together. So, it's good to know that we don't have to agree on everything. We can still communicate and you know, work together.

6.5.2 Quality of Relationships

Highlighted as pivotal issues by the research participants, the development of quality relationships was identified as being a key capacity building ingredient largely because the development of trust has such important cultural currency and is particularly important precursor towards developing relationships. There were many quite extraordinarily rich and powerful statements made that signified the depth of the quality of the relationships developed – many of which focused on relationships between each other.

One of my favourite statements that seem to sum up so many aspects of connectedness, and achieving a sense of belonging (via the intersection between 'cultural identify and healing': intra-personal capacity building' and 'inter-personal capacity building') is the following statement:

I don't know whether its Aboriginal people, but once we bared our souls – that's it – they become part of you.

As one research participant explained:

In the Aboriginal community it is very hard to deal with personal and sensitive issues because we are so personal with each other. Because of the close bonds established with each other, I would have confidence with networking with other graduates over highly sensitive and controversial issues.

I've actually looked for graduates when having personal problems – so the bonds with some of them are really tight.

I think one of the things occurred after that was solidarity within – a sense of unity. Almost like we felt this was a special group, and that's what it was all about – becoming, sort of focussing in on ourselves, and what we could all do for each other. But there was certainly this looking after each other, watching each other's back, sort of thing going on.

6.5.3 Application of networks

Similar to the recognised significance of networks towards Indigenous capacity building, was the acknowledgement of their application in a whole range of settings that relate to the workplace in particular. Some of the statements are provided below and highlight that the relationships developed have been important in their application. These appear to be grouped according to two domains, contingent on the level of experience or contact within the Aboriginal community broadly and the deepening of expectations for those with already established relationships. Whilst not wanting to dismiss the importance of the latter, the development of strong networks for those people working in Aboriginal Affairs with little experience, is critical. This is not just from the perspective of maintaining individual well being and the importance of social connectedness, but from the perspective of maintaining a cultural base for those Indigenous people working in Aboriginal Affairs as well as enabling an easier path of navigation and necessary meaningful engagement of Aboriginal people. As the old adage says 'united we stand, divided we fall'.

I use leadership networks all the time in my job. All I have to do is pick up the phone and know that I am a priority and vice versa.'

The networks were one of the best things. We all know what we are doing now – and who may not be working and need support, and that support is given even to them now.

I had some networks but it really opened up my eyes – I didn't even know where some of the coops were – now I have contact people in them.

Coming from a regional area before the program – I didn't have a lot of networks.

6.5.4 Pathways to employment and education

Significant findings were found in relation to the importance of pathways to employment or education.

This was reflected upon in the context of the space provided for people to assess their own questions such as were they in a role that they were best suited to in terms of their passions and strengths and weaknesses, what additional education and/or training did they need for either for vocational or generalist purposes. For others, the critical issue was a fundamental step even before being able to assess future education and employment pathways:

It gave me guidance and direction on how to be more involved in community work/Aboriginal Affairs.

Consider the following diverse reflective statements:

To me I am on a journey – I could have taken on a promotion as a result of the program and worked more in a management role – but I decided not to do that because it would take me away from re-unifying separated Aboriginal families. I am on a journey though and I don't know where it's going to end.

I think that everyone's happy with their current situation, and I know that they're, well, a couple of them have changed jobs just because they weren't happy.

I know some of them weren't happy in their position, and I know that they've left the position, and even if they're unemployed, they're a heap happier than what they were in the position.

And finally – another quote that does not necessarily reflect an isolated incident:

I got a \$30,000 pay increase from doing leadership development.

6.6 Community Capacity Building

The themes that emerged from 'community capacity building' were reflected strongly by the data in terms of clearly expressed perceived outcomes arising from the combination of both inter and intra-personal capacity building.

These themes were described as being necessary contributors towards the sustainability of Indigenous capacity building. They were described as contributing towards and broadening the existing Indigenous leadership base, ensuring on going community capacity building as well as engagement of community connectedness and transmission of culture. Importantly, the research participants strongly felt that whilst there were already some clear examples of them being achieved, the real and impact on these areas may not be seen for many years. What was considered important was that the necessary conditions had been provided through building intra-personal and inter-personal capacity building as almost a necessary pre-condition to enable the more macro Indigenous capacity building to take place. The sense really was that there were no impediments that existed to prevent people from 'flying there wings' and stepping up into bigger roles and responsibilities in families and the broader community, there was room for everybody and everybody collectively could make a difference and combine to build a stronger community generally.

Some of these underlying themes that have also been implicit in the data collected as part of intra and inter-personal capacity building have been the following:

- Support from Aboriginal Elders providing validation and support for emerging leaders to take there place whether now or in the future – and practical ways, ideas and support for how this could start or be built upon
- Recognition of the important responsibility of providing leadership to participant's own families –that families are the building blocks of strong

communities and that this should not be sacrificed as part of bigger community leadership role

- Greater confidence in dealing with individual and community conflict – the solution is not walking away

As one participant commented

We were encouraged to think that we all had a date with destiny – this date may arrive sooner rather than later – whenever it does arrive, it all adds up to making us a stronger community because we are stronger people.

Outlined below are a variety of quotes that were derived from the thematic analysis as part of the construction of my definition of 'Community Capacity Building':

It has strengthened our whole resolves, to be more powerful and play a bigger and more important role as in representing our people. I see it getting bigger and better – we've only just come out of the box!

You might not see the fruition straight away – but years down the track it will have effects. This program will have an everlasting effect on all of us.

The impact of the program flows onto on families – It's not the individual – it's how it affects our families.

I feel like the program was an initiation. The biggest thing I learnt was that you can learn to disagree and still get through issues: because we did! Conflict is everywhere in our community – I don't hide from it now.

For us coming at different levels and for me to be the youngest – it's amazing. We're all on different levels on different steps in our lives – but we've lost people who we have come under their wing. We know what the rest of the story needs to look like. We don't know how its going to

end – but we are actually part of the big picture – making history. Not wanting to take anything away from anybody – but I want to be part of the struggle and fight.

People we know now expect more of us – and so we expect more from ourselves

It made me look at our leaders differently – and understand some of the issues and situations they gone through and not be so judgmental as I had been. So I acknowledged their struggle in ending up as leaders and that they have had to get there by earning the respect and prove themselves.

6.6.1 Building a stronger leadership base

The results may not be seen straight away. But looking into the future – you could be looking at future prime ministers, ministers – or going into parliament – that is where our strengths lay.

Some of them are legendary – all of them are. For them, to take the time out to talk to us – that was mega-special. And they taught us that we're valid – the future of this community. That's amazing.

Now we have leaders emerging – not elders but leaders like myself representing the much younger generation – but also more leaders from other generations.

I knew that eventually I would be able to have a voice in the community – at some level – but I didn't think that being young leader was something that would be able to do.

Part of me realising I could become leaders came from the encouragement I got from older leaders. I don't think that would have happened without the program – because of the mix of difference age groups and all the support and encouragement I got to help build me from where I am.

6.6.2 On-going community engagement

We have all got different things out of the program – but we all want the same things and that is to be reconnected back to who we are.

It helped me want to become involved again. I took up the NAIDOC committee again and in a much bigger role.

It made me have the confidence to be part of a community radio program – which I would never have even considered before.

I realized that I'm not just about my own journey in Aboriginal and community affairs. I'm about supporting and taking and people along with me. So I've really taken on an active role in supporting and encouraging quite a few Koorie young fellas.

6.7 Research Participant Stories

Outlined below are two case studies, both women and graduates of the program from different years. To protect anonymity, names have been changed. All interviews occurred between September and November, 2005.

MARIKA'S STORY

Marika is a Gunditjamara single mother of two children who has been active in Aboriginal Affairs from an early age.

She has a strong background in sports and recreation – an area where she has worked for over 15 years. Marika has a passion for promoting healthy living and improving sport and recreation opportunities as a vehicle for improving the overall well being of individuals, families and the whole community.

Marika is highly regarded in the Koorie community in the metropolitan region as well as by communities across the State where she is considered to be a 'grass roots' active Aboriginal community member.

Marika regards the leadership program as an important experience where she was able to expand her networks and even thought she has been actively involved in the Aboriginal community for all her life, she got to know people at a much deeper level. The leadership program took her out of her comfort zone, which she said was very difficult but invaluable. Whilst Marika regards herself as being very confident with a healthy self esteem, having to practice her public speaking skills significantly boosted her confidence even further.

Marika acknowledges that even though she undertook a leadership development program, she is uncomfortable with being described as a 'leader' – although upon more reflection would acknowledge that she plays a leadership role in her own family. She sees herself as a role model and tries to live by example through leading a positive life.

Marika reflected on the challenging nature of the project work where there was

significant group work required, making sure that everyone has a role and that they are comfortable with that role and can do their best. "This type of work doesn't sound like a big deal but it actually is."

Marika made the comment that developing trust in the Aboriginal community is very important. She acknowledges that in the Aboriginal community especially it is often very hard to deal with sensitive and controversial issues because as she describes 'we are so personal with each other.' Marika believes that that because of the close bonds and trust established between each other, she would have every confidence in networking with other graduates over highly sensitive/controversial issues.

On networking, Marika made the comment that there were other participants with extraordinary leadership potential who just did not have many networks in the Aboriginal community for various reasons (i.e. weren't raised in Victoria and/or raised outside the Aboriginal community). The program for them really provided the networks and community links that they need in order to 'shine' and show their true potential.

Marika gave one example of how one participant who was new to the community and had had some really negative experiences when she tried to gain acceptance and get involved. The participants especially provided her with a lot of 'acceptance' and really encouraged her to keep going. Since the program she went on to be the elected chair of a major Koorie organisation and very active in her own community generally. That community probably would not have enjoyed her major contribution without the program.

Revealing people's own personal struggles being affected by family violence, Marika said, had the potential of being explosive for people. Because of the support shown by everybody and the caring and understanding, the bonding and friendships were made a lot stronger.

On building leadership, Marika said "The program has without a doubt expanded the 'Self identified leadership pool' within the Aboriginal community.

Marika talked a lot about how the community is well known for its tall poppy

syndrome. "Whenever anything positive is happening, there's always somebody in the background wanting to shoot it down. And no matter what, we're always going to have those people. Many are the product of their environment as well, and their upbringing, you understand why and how this is the case – there are so many negatives within Aboriginal communities. But I think, with the leadership program – whilst there were a lot of people being very cynical about it – you can't maintain that when you see what difference it is making on the people involved in doing it."

SOPHIA'S STORY

Half way through the leadership program Sophia moved into a management position running a mentor program. From then on she moved into another area where she did not have much experience in.

Sophia said the program gave her "the provisions to spread my wings and fly".

Whilst clearly Sophia was able to advance in her employment, this was not her proudest and biggest achievement as an outcome of undertaking the leadership program. One of the biggest achievements she believes that she has made since doing the program has been her focus on being a role model and mentor to a range of Koorie youth.

Sophia believes that one of the key learnings from the program was the need for Koorie youth to 'step up' and start taking on more active roles in the community. As Sophia put it

I realized that I'm not just about my own journey in Aboriginal and community affairs. I'm about supporting and taking and people along

with me. So I've really taken on an active role in supporting and encouraging quite a few Koorie young fellas.

Importantly, before doing the program Sophia felt both uncertain and insecure in her role in Aboriginal Affairs and she had no network of her own that she could trust and lean on. Sophia now reports that her leadership program networks are now the ones she uses and they provide her with a lot of confidence and feedback.

Sophia is now working in a mainstream capacity. For many of the staff, she is the first Indigenous person that they have been in contact with. She believes that the program has given her confidence and encouragement to take on role which really is about educating non-Indigenous people and that often means challenging issues within her working environment.

In terms of other improvements in her self confidence and self esteem, Sophia still keeps in her drawer the envelope that contains positive comments that each participant was required to write about her.

She regularly draws inspiration from this feedback and the regard others had of her. In a social sense, Sophia had previously had some negative experiences with community members that made her feel intimidated by attending and being involved in social activities. As she says

I've had a few issues with other people in the community which sort of frightened me away. I don't care anymore – I just attend.

Sophia feels very strongly that it is her obligation to pass on whatever knowledge and skills she has gained to share them with younger people who have not had the same opportunity as she has had.

7. An analysis of Key Learnings from Indigenous Capacity Building projects

After the third year of the Koorie community leadership program, the organisation I worked for experienced a major organisational challenge which had a significant impact on the nature of work I undertook in collaboration with others.

Out of necessity, my role changed into someone who assisted with actively identifying and securing external funding for consultancy and project work, and then playing a key role in fulfilling the contractual obligations. Much of this work was outside my 'comfort zone' and I did experience some serious doubts about my abilities in a whole range of areas that we were seeking to offer our services in and across.

The number of projects that we became involved in developed very quickly over time. In total, there were 7 key projects that were undertaken. The artefacts together with the key learnings from these projects comprise the Training Resource Guide which is the product element of this thesis.

7.1 List of key Indigenous Capacity Building Projects

1. Research, Planning and Establishment of State-wide Service Delivery in Problem Gambling (eg Dep't of Justice)
2. Facilitation in Cultural Awareness Training with State and Local Government Agencies (eg Department of Justice, Darebin City Council)
3. Capacity Building Projects and Training within Aboriginal Agencies (eg Lake Tyers, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). Aborigines Advancement League, Victorian Aboriginal Education Association (VAEAI)
4. Policy Formulation and Presentations: Impact of death and service retention of the Victorian Aboriginal Funeral Service (VAFS); Suicide

prevention – need for expanded resources due to increase in suicides (eg Dep't of Human Services, Department of Health and Aged Services; Problem Gambling in Indigenous communities (Dept of Human Services) and State wide Indigenous consultations around Mental Health Reform Strategy

5. Managing Change and promoting emerging leadership in a new community based organisational environment – organisational restructure (VACCHO)
6. Organisational Development of Aboriginal Agencies (eg VAEAI Annual Reports, Victorian Aboriginal Funeral Service Strategic and Operational Plan and report skills workshops)
7. National Consultancies (eg FaCSIA)

7.2 Summary of the key leadership skills demonstrated and the documentation in the Training Resource Guide

| 1. Research, Planning and Establishment of State-wide Service Delivery in Problem Gambling (eg Dep't of Justice) | |
|--|---|
| Leadership Demonstrated <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawing on existing networks • Creating new networks • Mentoring staff • Public speaking • Chairing meetings • Strategic Planning • Delegation • Development of new management and operational systems • Recruitment of staff • Team building • Communication with key stakeholders | Documentation In Product <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mapping and Scoping Documentation • Operational Plan • Health Promotion Resources |
| 2. Facilitation in Cultural Awareness Training with State and Local Government Agencies (eg Department of Justice, Darebin City Council) | |
| Leadership Demonstrated <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negotiation with key-stakeholders • Tender-writing • Customisation of product • Professional facilitation skills • Creating opportunities for people's self- | Documentation In Product <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program Documents • Summaries of Outcomes • Evaluation Document |

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>knowledge about working with diverse groups of learners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and implementation of evaluation model • Continuous learning and reflection from major Aboriginal Elder – <i>key facilitator in all training</i> | |
| <p>3. Capacity Building Projects and Training within Aboriginal Agencies (eg Lake Tyers, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, Aborigines Advancement League).</p> | |
| <p>Leadership Demonstrated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity to analyse needs and customise training materials and delivery that is responsive to needs and culturally appropriate • Ability to pursue training opportunities with major training organisation and secure accredited management training for current and emerging Koorie managers in community controlled sector • Awareness of importance of integrating history and its impact • Sensitivity to individual and group dynamics • Increasing development of networks across all levels of major Aboriginal organisations | <p>Documentation In Product</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lake Tyers Program Outline • VACCA Program Outline and Support Materials (including 'relationship building' and 'working in teams' and 'emotional intelligence') • Information/course brochure – new management course for Aboriginal organisations (metro) • Project brief and Newspaper article – promoting Koorie youth sports leadership programs • Aboriginal Advancement League Program Outline |
| <p>4. Policy Formulation (Impact of death and need to sustain the Victorian Aboriginal Funeral Service (VAFS); Suicide prevention – need for expanded resources due to increase in suicides (eg Dep't of Human Services, Department of Health and Aged Services), State-wide coordination and advocacy role – Mental Health Reform Strategy (eg. Dep't of Human Services)</p> | |
| <p>Leadership Demonstrated</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance of community connections • Ability to influence and advocate at all levels of Government and identify strategic interventions necessary • Reading a context • Adaptability • Writing skills • Data collection • Successful collaboration with numerous stakeholder groups to ensure community voices in major mental health reform process • Making recommendations • Identification of significant youth crisis (ie. Emerging Koori youth gang) • Ability to document issues and implications for community and government | <p>Documentation In Product</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintenance of community connections • Ability to influence and advocate at all levels of Government and identify strategic interventions necessary • Reading a context • Adaptability • Writing skills • Data collection • Successful collaboration with numerous stakeholder groups to ensure community voices in major mental health reform process • Making recommendations • Identification of significant youth crisis (ie. Emerging Koori youth gang) • Ability to document issues and implications for community and government |

| 5. Organisational Development of Aboriginal Agencies (eg VAEAI, Victorian Aboriginal Funeral Service) | |
|--|--|
| Leadership Demonstrated <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Working with diverse groups• Understanding of regional and rural education trends• Deep understanding of and respect for cultural protocols• Identification of capacity building need in the area of report writing skills.• Provision of customised training and individual coaching as part of transfer of skills• Demonstration of integrity in representing issues and concerns of families experiencing death and those people working in the area of funeral arrangements• Ability to reflect and translate organisational and community aspirations to ensure the sustainability of the Victorian Aboriginal Funeral Service | Documentation In Product <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Annual reports• Operational and Strategic Plan for the Victorian Aboriginal Funeral Service |
| 6. National Consultancies (e.g. FaCSIA) | |
| Leadership Demonstrated <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Working with a diverse team• Managing conflict• Research and Presentation skills• Complexities of representing Indigenous issues in the context of national diversity• Working with Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups | Documentation In Product <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cross-Cultural Manual FACSIA |

7.3 Reflections on the major highlights of Indigenous capacity building projects, Project Three: ‘Capacity building projects and training within Aboriginal Agencies’

Of all of the work that was done in collaboration with others, the most rewarding and beneficial project in the context of contributing to Indigenous capacity building was Project Three which provided customised training to most of the major Aboriginal organisations in Melbourne.

Not only was this a key highlight of my professional career in Indigenous capacity building , but I believe it significantly contributed to the Indigenous

capacity building model – particularly in terms of intra-personal capacity building (i.e. Self awareness, self knowledge, Healing and identity) as well as inter-personal capacity building (i.e. Improvements in quality relationships)

In many ways this provided the opportunity to extend features of the VACSAL Koorie Community Leadership Program and contributed to each element of my Indigenous Capacity Building model.

Key features of this project included the following:

- The ability to offer tailored training/professional development programs to our own community – including the delivery of key elements of the VACSAL Koorie Community Leadership Program
- Recognition that not all Aboriginal people know their history, and have had the opportunity to unpack this collectively and consider this against organisational history
- The ability to deliver customised training as part of a skills transfer process and coaching provided by Dr. Mark Rose including key teaching topics covered in the VASCAL Koorie Community Leadership Program such as 'team building', 'managing conflict', 'emotional intelligence' 'Belbin Team Roles etc.

This capacity building training was perceived to have many benefits. One highly experienced and respected worker from a large Aboriginal agency said at one of our workshop's conclusions

This was the best training I have ever done in my life – and I have done heaps.

The other factor we became aware of was how little customised professional development opportunities are offered in reality to our workers on Aboriginal organisations.

For all these reasons, a Training Resource Guide is being presented as the product component of this thesis.

8. Conclusion

In this exegesis I have explored through two case studies and an analysis of Indigenous capacity building projects, how my life experiences and my leadership journey have informed my professional practice.

Through this research process I have discovered that my own life experiences and journey in Aboriginal Affairs particularly, have mirrored the findings of my research conducted with graduates/research participants from the VACSAL Koorie Community Leadership Program. The most significant finding of my research is the development and construction of a model which describes the key characteristics or determinants of Indigenous capacity building through developing Indigenous leadership.

This model has been validated from interviews and focus groups undertaken with participants of the VASCAL Koorie Community Leadership Program and is supported by the findings of my own research which has examined my own life experiences and leadership journey.

The Model has also provided me with a very useful analytical framework and construct to enable me to provide much depth, insight and personal reflection on my perception of the relevant influences and events that have contributed towards my work and leadership journey. Significantly, I have placed 'culture' at the core of my model and explained how this imbues every element of intra-personal as well as inter-personal capacity building determinants.

Outlined below are some reflections on how I have unpacked the leanings from my own intra-personal capacity building.

This intra-personal capacity building is described in the research as representing a cluster of similar yet interdependent characteristics which combined together contribute toward building stronger 'internal' capacities and resilience that is a key dimension towards promoting leadership through Indigenous capacity building. These dimensions include an increase in self knowledge, self confidence and self awareness as well as strengthened cultural identity and healing from the impacts of colonisation.

I have reflected comprehensively on the importance of my cultural heritage in shaping who I am and how this influences much of what I do, how I do it, and why I do it. I have shared the stories of some of my forebears, including the great Tasmanian warrior Manarlagenna whose sacrifices for his people continue to provide me with inspiration.

Similarly, I have also described the impact of having other descendants being invariably survivors/victims of genocide/colonisation and assimilation policies as well as sex and slave fodder. I have also expressed my frustration at the convenient myths associated with the perception that Tasmanian Aborigines were 'wiped out' that serves the purpose of reinforcing stereotypes about Aboriginal identity. Whilst this was a source of great source of frustration for many years in terms of 'proving myself', this is fortunately is no longer the case.

Significantly, it is because of this history and legacy, as well as the relative educational advantages and life opportunities that I have enjoyed that motivates me to work towards making a difference in my work towards Indigenous capacity building or strengthening. A significant focus of my research has related to my need to find my own 'voice' and sense of place within the Aboriginal community. This has been important because being connected to community is a value and a feeling that helps sustain me. Not surprisingly then in a broader framework, research is increasingly telling us how 'culture' is a protective factor.

The concept of 'self-awareness' has been an important and on-going theme that has permeated throughout my life experiences and leadership journey. I have shared experiences of being involved in a mainstream leadership program and the discovery that I am just as capable as the so-called 'high fliers.' I have also demonstrated my growing realisation that leadership and management are separate yet interrelated.

For my own development, the realisation that I suffered from weaknesses in management capacities meant that my leadership development and contribution would be impeded and that I would not even consider taking on any type of significant leadership role until this had occurred.

I had learnt from personal experience the horror of being promoted into a role without having the necessary skills to enable confidence to flourish. This self knowledge led to tertiary studies in management and leadership later in my career where I reflected whether or not I would produce better results as a decision maker or advisor. This question stayed with me until it was finally tested in more recent years.

For me, my growing self confidence, increasing self awareness and ability to improve a range of skills have been major contributors that have informed my professional practice in Indigenous capacity building.

Reflections of my own leadership journey have highlighted the equal yet complimentary significance of inter-personal capacity building as part of my development, and how this is complimentary to Intra-personal capacity building as provided in my Indigenous Capacity Building model. I have highlighted how important the development of quality relationships has been to me in providing support, mentoring and wisdom in my leadership journey.

I have explained how the quality and nature of these relationships lies at the heart of all work related to Indigenous capacity building. These relationships are built on the foundations of trust and respect – both

important cultural values - and no amount of community strengthening can be achieved without this. I have also described how loyalty is such an important element in maintaining these relationships and how I have experienced this first hand to the detriment of what were previously significant friendships. There are personal costs associated with working in Aboriginal Affairs.

I have also described the many benefits of working as part of a high performing and supportive team during the years of the Koorie Community Leadership Program. This includes the sense of confidence that seemed to gradually grow within me as I similarly observed others' self confidence growing, including the research participants as well as my co-workers.

This was also impacted by the need to take risks outside of my comfort zone with regard to increasing facilitation and teaching responsibilities, which I discovered I have a passion for.

My research supports an understanding that Indigenous Community Capacity building is about community strengthening - in recognition of the existing capabilities and assets of communities, in contrast to the deficit view that so often accompanies critiques of Indigenous Capacity Building.

This knowledge is continuing to evolve, reflecting the increasing understanding that successful community building needs to involve all parties that impact on a community.

I believe that this research will provide a major contribution to the growing amount of work on Indigenous capacity building and recognition of the integral role of leadership development in this context. For me, this is of much importance because the research has validated how investing in Indigenous leadership development cultivates Indigenous capacity building. The challenges now are many.

Firstly, it is critical that Indigenous people are provided with support to develop their knowledge, skills and networks to lead communities, organisations and nations in the 21st Century. It is clear that the development of leadership can no longer be ignored or downplayed when scoping, developing or indeed implementing any Indigenous capacity building initiative. Further, as this research highlights, investing in leadership development needs to involve two main purposes: to enhance the capabilities of existing Indigenous leaders and to create a larger pool of Indigenous leaders available from the community with a range of skills across all areas. This will not occur without deliberate, strategic and intensive resources.

Whilst rhetorical recognition of this may exist as espoused by government policy and educational institutions, the meaningful resources actually allocated to support investment in programs, training and further research around Indigenous leadership do not signify this as a priority. This research will hopefully contribute to the evidence base needed for this to change.

My experiences through the leadership program and exposure to so many different current and emerging leaders and Aboriginal Elders have contributed towards an acceptance and entrée into the community whereby I now have some authority to advocate on behalf of the interests of Aboriginal community health organisations as appropriate.

Indeed the research shows how any attempts to promote Indigenous capacity building must be informed by Indigenous cultural values, aspirations and sense of cultural identity.

On reflection, there is not a lot I would change about the program given the same context and level of resources and time to commitment of the facilitation team. I think any possible opportunities for improvement was exhausted through continuous improvement strategies and the successful nature of the program as evidenced by the multi awards that the program received.

If resource restraints were not a barrier, the program would have more staff and the administrative and executive support that would mirror the same level of resources achieved by the comparable Leadership Plus Program that was also running at the same time (an intensive leadership development program run for people with disabilities).

The Leadership Plus Program was and still is an innovative Leadership development program and was able to attract resources from the then Victorian TAFE Department that enabled them to have a core administration/program coordination centre. If our program was able to attract the same level of additional core funding, we would have been able to undertake supplementary activities that would have supported the actual learning and development program. For example, the Leadership Plus program similarly ran at the same time.

Interestingly – there was an unofficial reason provided to me at the time for the Department not providing equal funding and support - despite the similarity between the two programs and meeting the general criteria. This reasoning was due to potential community backlash given recent financial difficulties experienced by a regionally-based Aboriginal Training Provider – and that the Government could not ‘risk’ being associated with injecting funds and supporting any further ‘failed’ training/development initiatives.

So why is this story relevant, one may ask? Despite the obvious reference to the nature of institutional racism that impacted negatively on the ability of this program to achieve some sustainability, it unfortunately highlights the difficulties associated with Aboriginal community organisations seeking to support programs such as this Leadership program on their own.

In the future I would pursue a partnership arrangement with a University especially and one that was based on less good will and ‘informal’ support and more on formal partnership agreements that included some agreed strategies

for income raising strategies and possible auspicing arrangements to better position the program to attract government, corporate and philanthropic funding.

I do believe a **state-wide** Aboriginal Leadership Development program for adult emerging community leaders should be developed and offered– this could be largely modelled off the VACSAL Leadership Program and other successful Aboriginal Leadership programs that are relevant. This would undoubtedly receive much community support. One different element that I would introduce would be some joint program delivery opportunities with comparable mainstream leadership programs (i.e. Leadership Victoria). I believe this is a natural extension and what is needed to take us to the ‘next level’ of supporting the leadership development aspirations of the many extraordinary current and emerging Aboriginal leaders across our communities.

I am hopeful, through my recent cooption to the Indigenous Leadership Network Board to be able to support any such endeavours that will no doubt support the future sustainability of our communities.

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Appendix 1. Summary of Helen Kennedy's diagnostic test results (conducted 2002)

1. Belbins 'Team Role Inventory'

The Belbin's Team Role diagnostic tool provides an inventory or 'natural preferences' for operating as a team of 'Team Work' and 'Team Roles.'

Resource Investigator – characterised by being extroverted, enthusiastic, curious, and communicative. Positive qualities include a capacity for contacting people and exploring anything new and an ability to respond to challenge. Weaknesses include the potential to lose interest once the initial fascination has passed.

Innovator – individualistic, serious minded, unorthodox. Positive qualities include genius, imagination and knowledge. Weaknesses include head being up in the clouds, including to disregard practical details or protocols.

2 Transformational Leadership Type

A high score was achieved on most of the six basic dimensions of the Transformational leader – as profiled by the diagnostic test referred to as the – 'Transformation and Charismatic Leadership (PM Podsakoff, SB MacKenzie, R.H Mooriam and R. Fetter (1990)).

This includes having an articulate vision, providing appropriate modelling, fostering goal acceptance, individual support and intellectual stimulation. Further, a high score as a Transactional leader indicates relatively strong behavioural orientations to give something to your followers in exchange for their giving something to you that as leaders you want or expect.

- Behavioural components of transformational leaders include:
- Essentially opposed to the status quo and strive to achieve it
- Idealised vision which is highly discrepant with status quo
- Shared perspective and idealised vision makes me a likeable and honourable her worthy of identification and imitation

- Expert at using unconventional means to transcend order (expertise)
- Unconventional
- High need for changing the status quo
- Strong articulation of future vision and motivation to lead
- Personal power (based on expertise, respect and admiration)
- Elitist, entrepreneur transforms people to share the radical changes advocated

3. Myer Briggs Indicator (MBTI)

The MBTI is 'primarily concerned with the differences in people that result from where they like to focus their attention, the way they take in information, the way they like to decide, and the kind of 'lifestyle they adopt' (Myers, K and Kirby, L 1994)

ENTJ – are logical, organised, structured, objective and decisive about what they view as conceptually valid.

What we contribute to the organisation: develop well thought out plans, provide structure to the organisation, good strategist – working towards broad based goals; take charge quickly; and deal directly with problems caused by confusion and inefficiency.

Leadership Style: take an action-oriented approach; provide long range vision to the organisation; managing directly and tough when necessary, enjoy complex problems; run as much of the organisation as possible.

- **Potential shortfalls** – may overlook people's needs in their focus on the task; may overlook practical considerations and constraints, may decide too quickly and appear impatient and domineering; may ignore and suppress their own feelings.

Appendix 2 – letter requesting participation in research (Case Study Two)

Name of research participant

Date: *24 March 2005*

Dear X,

My name is Helen Kennedy. I am undertaking a study as part of a Master of Education degree in the School of Education at RMIT University. The title of my research is 'Cultivating Indigenous Capacity Building Through Leadership Development'.

In this research project, I will explore the ways in which the Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association (VACSAL) is able to achieve Indigenous 'capacity building' by promoting leadership development through its Koorie Community Leadership Program.

The key research question of my thesis is:

How has the VASCAL Koorie Leadership Program cultivated Indigenous capacity building through promoting leadership development in its participants and graduates?

The project will produce a number of products that are targeted at different audiences. These will include:

- Case studies of leadership graduates, which demonstrate how the leadership graduates recognise their leadership development
- An overview and analysis of 'Indigenous capacity building'.

To gather my data I will be conducting 10 individual interviews with five graduates from each of the two years of the program intakes in 2002 and 2003. I will also be facilitating two focus groups with the same research participants, one group from 2002, and one from 2003.

I would like to invite you to be one of the research participants in this project. If you agree to take part in the project, your time commitment would be up to a one-hour interview and up to a ninety minute focus group.

With your permission, I will tape record and film the interview and focus group. Prior to the interview and focus group, you will be asked if you are comfortable with the interview and focus group being tape-recorded and filmed. If, at any time, you request that the recorder or camera be turned off, I will comply. If you decide that you are not comfortable with some or all of the content of an interview or focus group being recorded, I will undertake not to include it in the research or destroy the tape/film as required.

You will be free to leave the interview and focus group at any time. You also have the option of retrospectively requesting that any data, including tape-recorded or filmed data, be excluded from the research project. In such an occurrence, your requests would automatically be granted.

I will keep the audiotapes, videotapes and transcriptions in a locked cabinet at my home address for five years and will destroy them after the five-year period.

If I present the findings of the research in publications or conferences, there will be no identifying information that would reveal your identity unless you choose otherwise.

If you have any questions, at any stage of the process, please contact me on (03) 9416 4266 or 0401 669623. You can also direct enquiries to my research supervisor Dr Laura Brearley and Dr. Julian Lippi from the RMIT School of Education on (03) 9925 7923.

Thank you for your interest in the project.

Yours Sincerely

Helen Kennedy

Any complaints about your participation in this project may be directed to the Secretary, RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee, University Secretariat, RMIT, GPO Box 2476V, Melbourne, 3001. The telephone number is (03) 9925 1745.

Details of the complaints procedure are available from: www.rmit.edu.au/council/hrec